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OR,

THE GOLD SEEKERS OF THE BAHAMAS.

A Story of Sea Brigands and Sea Heroes.

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AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTE-
ZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. A SEA HERO.

AN American brig-of-war had been caught in the path of a West Indian hurricane, and in a cruising ground dangerous in the extreme, for it was among the Bahama Islands.

Her commander was an able seaman, and his officers and crew were of the best, but in a twinkling the brig had been dismasted, her boats torn away, bulwarks stove, while her decks had been swept by waves that dragged off to a watery grave a dozen gallant tars.

The anchors were let fall, and it was hoped that the wreck would ride out the terrible tempest, when the carpenter reported a leak which threatened death to all.

FROM ALOFT CAME THE CLEAR, BOYISH VOICE, DISTINCTLY HEARD ABOVE THE ROAR: "STARBOARD! STARBOARD YOUR HELM, HARD!"

In vain did the crew struggle at the pumps, for all soon knew that the wreck must go down within a couple of hours at furthest.

"Wreck ahoy!"

Out of the darkness astern came the hail, and a vivid flash of lightning revealed a small schooner under barely enough sail to steady her, coming up directly in the teeth of the storm and not a cable's length away.

"I will anchor close under your stern, so come aboard in your boats, as I see your vessel is settling," cried a manly voice from on board the schooner.

A cheer greeted the words, and then came the fateful response:

"Ay, ay, my brave fellow, but we have not a single boat left."

"All right, sir! I will come aboard for you," and then followed the order in the same commanding tones to let fall both anchors and lower away the life-boat.

These commands were promptly obeyed by those on the schooner, and soon the lightning revealed a large white boat, urged by eight oarsmen and steered by one who stood erect, come around the stern of the sinking vessel and head up under the lee of the wreck.

The boat tossed wildly about, but still crept on and was breathlessly watched by the crew of the brig until a rope was thrown and it was drawn up under the stern of the now water-logged craft.

"I can carry back twenty men, sir. How many have you in crew?" asked the rescuer coolly.

"Ninety men all told, sir; but my own crew will man your boat once the first party have reached your vessel."

"No, sir; we understand our boat and five trips will take all off."

"All ready, sir!"

The twenty men told off slid down the ropes as ordered and the life-boat returned upon its perilous voyage.

But the schooner was reached in safety, and back again went the daring rescuers to the wreck.

"If you only had another boat, sir," said the commander of the brig, who was fretted at not being able to aid also.

"No other boat than this, sir, would live in this sea," was the response, and a second time the life-boat returned to the schooner with twenty more of the brig's crew.

A third, fourth, fifth and sixth voyage was made, for the rescuer insisted upon saving what could be saved from the brig; and, after four long hours of hardship and struggle with death, the gallant life-savers were again upon their own vessel now crowded with the men they had snatched from a grave in the sea.

And not too soon, for the wreck went down when the life-boat was but a few lengths away on her last trip back to the schooner.

As though reveling in its destruction, and furious at having lost its prey, the tempest now began to rage with greater fury than before, and the gallant rescuer sprang to the wheel of his vessel, ordered the anchors up with haste and his men to their posts.

"Our case is still desperate, sir, in spite of your great courage, for there are islands, rocks and shoals all about us," cried the commander of the brig, who with his officers were gathered astern on the schooner.

"I know these waters well, sir, and shall run for a harbor," came the reply in a confident tone.

"If you can do so in this hurricane and blackness you are more than mortal man," said the brig's captain energetically.

"I am but an humble man, sir, but I can save this vessel, and will," was the response as the young man grasped the wheel firmly, while his schooner bounded away before the tempest under fore-staysail and mainsail reefed down.

The rescued crew clung to the bulwarks starboard and port, from quarter-deck to fore-castle, while the officers, as said, were grouped aft about the daring helmsman, whose men, a score in number, were at their posts.

Like a huge, frightened thing of life the schooner rushed forward in the darkness, reeling, staggering plunging through the tempest-swept waters, while astern came howling the winds and waves with furious roar and terrific force.

The clouds were black and low, the lightning now and then blinding in its vividness and the thunder peals seemed to shake the very sea.

Here and there an ugly looking island would be seen by the lightning's glare, or a long line of breakers, but the undaunted steersman held on his course unwaveringly, with only an order now and then to his faithful and confident crew.

At length came a vivid gleam, and nearly a hundred voices cried in terror:

"Breakers ahead!"

"An island of rock!"

"Reefs!"

But, like an arrow the schooner dashed by, to, a moment later, come around as on a pivot and fairly bound under the shelter of an overhanging wall of rugged cliff.

Her reeling, staggering motion ended, and the

obedient craft glided smoothly along until the order came:

"Let go the anchors!"

Down they went, and as the schooner's headway ceased the rescuer said quietly:

"The danger is over, sir, for we are in a perfectly snug harbor here."

"My brave man, who and what are you?" cried the naval officer as he grasped the hand of the young skipper.

"My name is Claude Cassiday, sir, and I am skipper of this schooner, the Storm Queen, a West Indian trader out of Boston," was the modest response of the young sailor.

CHAPTER II.

WON BY PLUCK.

"COME, Helen, there is your father's vessel, the Storm Queen, I am sure."

"Yes, mamma; there goes the flag."

The first speaker was a handsome young woman of twenty-seven, and she addressed her little daughter of six years of age.

The two stood upon the porch of a small cottage overlooking Boston Harbor, and their eyes were upon a graceful schooner coming swiftly up toward the city.

As the child spoke a blue flag with a gold anchor went up to the fore, while the Stars and Stripes were visible at the peak.

Upon the deck of the schooner, besides the crew, was one who is to appear in the pages of this story.

He was a man of thirty, with a handsome face, bold air and a complexion browned by long exposure to the elements.

But upon his face now rested a look of sadness, and as he held the wheel with a firm grasp, tears stole beneath his eyelids and trickled down his bronzed cheeks, though he uttered no word of sorrow.

The man's gaze often turned upon the little cottage ashore, but his vessel was held straight on to an anchorage before the town.

"Now I will know what that official document means," said the woman, as she kept her eyes upon the schooner.

"I don't see brother Claude, mother," cried little Helen, who was watching the decks closely.

"Nor do I, Helen."

"I do hope nothing has gone wrong with my brave boy," and the mother's face paled and her heart beat anxiously.

The schooner sped on to an anchorage, rounded to, let fall her mud-hooks, furlled her sails and soon after a boat left her side for the town.

After a long while it returned to the schooner and then came directly toward the shore where on stood the cottage.

As it touched the beach the tall form of the schooner's young captain leaped ashore and, the next moment, his strong arms were about his wife, who gave a low sob as she cried:

"Oh, Claude, where is our boy?"

The strong man choked up and for a moment could not speak.

But at last he said:

"God only knows, wife, whether he is at the bottom of the sea, or a captive of the Buccaneers of the Bahamas."

"My God! my child is dead, or worse!" groaned the poor mother, while the sailor led her to the cottage moaning bitterly, in unison with the loud weeping of little Helen for her lost brother.

"I will tell you all, Helen, my dear wife:

"We were becalmed off the Bahamas, and having been doing double duty on account of my first mate's illness, I was asleep in the cabin."

"Claude went for a row in the skiff, all alone, and was last seen among a group of islands."

"Night came on stormy and dark as Erebus, so we had to await until the next day to search for him. Then we found his boat, ashore, but with his tracks were many others, and the mark of a large boat's prow in the sand."

"This led us to believe he had been kidnapped by the lawless rovers who infest the islands, and whose prisoner, you know, I once was for several years."

"I cruised around to every old retreat, I knew, but could find no trace of our noble boy, so was compelled to go on my voyage, in the interest of the owners of the schooner."

"That night a terrible hurricane caught us right in among the islands, and but for my knowledge of the locality we would have been lost, all of us."

"I had observed a brig-of-war before sunset, so determined to run to her aid, and arrived to find her a wreck; but I rescued every man on board, and ran for the buccaneer island which was their retreat when I was a prisoner."

"The next day I sailed for San Augustine and landed the crew of the wrecked brig, after which I went on my voyage, but with a sad heart indeed at the uncertain fate of our poor boy."

"Alas! poor Claude! and to-day he would be just ten years old. And it was I who urged you to take him, Claude, on your voyage."

"Do not upbraid yourself, wife, but remember that but for my remaining in these waters to search for Claude, the whole crew of the brig-of-war would have been lost."

"I am glad to feel that this palliates our deep loss, my husband; but, let me give you a letter that came for you, bearing the Government stamp."

"Indeed! Can Lieutenant Hartwell have kept his promise, I wonder, for he said I should get a commission for my services," and an expression of pleasure crossed the sad face of the sailor.

Mrs. Cassiday sent little Helen to bring the official letter, and, breaking the seal Claude Cassiday read aloud:

"SIR:—

"Lieutenant Harold Hartwell, of the U. S. Brig-of-war Saturn, lately lost among the Bahamas, has reported the daring and noble services rendered himself, his officers and crew, whose lives you saved at the risk of your own, and as such an act of heroism demands reward, the President has appointed you a Junior Lieutenant in the Navy of the United States, your commission to date from the night of your gallant rescue of ninety men from death."

"Lieutenant Hartwell reports that you are fully competent to assume the duties of a naval officer, and requests that you be assigned to the vessel to which he has been ordered, so you will report for duty on October 1st, on board the Sloop-of-war Emerald now fitting out in Boston Harbor."

"My love, my noble Claude! How glad am I to be the first to congratulate you upon the reward your bravery has won for you," cried Mrs. Cassiday earnestly, while a moment after she said sadly: "but, this is September the Fifteenth, and you have but two weeks to remain at home."

"I only hope that the Emerald is to sail for West Indian waters, Helen, for then I might be able to find our boy."

"Yes, Claude, if he is still alive, and was not lost in the storm," was the response of the bereaved young mother.

CHAPTER III.

THE LOST CUTTER.

"LIEUTENANT CASSIDAY, I have sent for you, sir, as you are fully acquainted with these waters, and I am desirous of having a thorough search made of these islands, in the hope of finding the rendezvous of some of the Bahama Sea Brigands who have their haunts here."

"I shall be most happy to go, Captain Sanford, especially as on the last trading voyage I made to the West Indies, I lost my little son here among these infested islands, but whether he was drowned or captured by the pirates, I do not know, sir."

"Indeed, Cassiday, you have my sympathy in your sorrow, and I only hope we can capture a nest of these outlaws and find your son a captive among them."

"I sincerely trust so, Captain Sanford; but how long shall I remain away?"

"I limit you to two weeks, and have ordered the whale-boat fitted out with three weeks' provisions, and you are to carry a dozen men and a midshipman."

"Yes, sir."

"This is not the season of storms, and I trust you will not be caught in any ugly weather."

"I shall cruise in this neighborhood, awaiting your return, and I wish you success, Mr. Cassiday, while, permit me to say, sir, though appointed from the merchant service, I have found you a most excellent officer in every respect."

"Thank you, Captain Sanford," replied Claude Cassiday, and with a parting salute he left the cabin of his commander, and half an hour after sailed away in the stanch whale-boat, upon his perilous cruise among the Bahama Islands.

The remark of Captain Sanford, that it was not the season of storms in that latitude, was not carried out by facts, as that night a fearful hurricane swept down upon the sea, and when dawn came all on board the stanch sloop-of-war Emerald were most anxious for the safety of the whale-boat.

Unless the boat had been able to find shelter under the lee of some island, the chances were one in a hundred that she had survived the tempest all knew.

The Emerald cruised away in the direction taken by the whale-boat, but days passed and nothing was seen of the missing boat.

A week after her leaving the sloop-of-war, another hurricane swept the seas, and the Emerald had a rough experience of it for a day and night.

But good weather followed, and the vessel-of-war again began her cruising in search of the missing whale-boat.

If it had weathered the first hurricane, it was hardly possible for it to have lived through the second.

So the search continued until nearly two weeks had passed, when the Emerald was headed for her rendezvous with Claude Cassiday, all hoping against hope that he would be there.

But no boat was visible, and the two weeks went by.

A week more followed, and then the captain of the sloop-of-war began a thorough search of the islands, in hope of finding some trace of the missing crew.

Cruising slowly along the shore of a reef-encircled island, one morning, the lookout hailed from aloft:

"Ho, the deck!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"There appears to be a flag fluttering among the rocks, sir, yonder."

An officer went aloft with a glass, and his report caused the sloop to let go her anchor, and two boats were lowered, and sent to find an opening in the reef, so that a landing could be made upon the island.

After a long search one boat was seen to pass through a break and land.

An hour passed away and just at sunset the boat was seen coming back, the other one, which had found no opening, joining it.

"Well, Lieutenant Hartwell, what did you discover?" anxiously asked Captain Sanford, as the former commander of the unfortunate brig-of-war Saturn came into his cabin as soon as he returned from the island.

"I regret, sir, to say that I found the graves of the crew of the whale-boat."

"Poor fellows! then they were lost?"

"Yes, sir."

"But not all of them, if you found graves, Hartwell."

"No, sir, not all, for one escaped, as I found but fourteen bodies."

"Ha! and whose was missing?"

"Cassiday's body was not there, sir, I am glad to say."

"Tell me all that you discovered, Hartwell," said Captain Sanford sadly.

"I saw a flag waving among the rocks, so found a break in the reef and made a landing."

"The flag was nailed upon an oar, stuck up among the rocks, and in the sand were fourteen graves."

"Fourteen?"

"Yes, sir, and I remembered that Lieutenant Cassiday had with him Midshipman Manning, a coxswain and twelve men."

"As the cutter was not to be found anywhere, and upon the oar that upheld the flag the names of those buried there had been cut with a knife, I saw that Cassiday's was not among them."

"This is remarkable, and hopeful of his escape."

"Yes, sir."

"It is strange that they were all dead."

"Upon the oar, sir, were cut the words:

"Graves of cutter's crew from U. S. Sloop of War Emerald. Driven ashore and wrecked at this point."

"Well, Mr. Hartwell, what do you think has become of Cassiday?"

"I think he has escaped in some mysterious manner, sir."

"He must have done so."

"He is a phenomenal swimmer, sir, and would live where others would drown, and so reached the shore; but that is all we could discover, though I searched the island thoroughly."

"I will land myself in the morning and open the graves, while a large force shall search every crevice of the island."

"If we do not find Cassiday in the graves, or his body upon the island, he has surely escaped in some mysterious way," said Captain Sanford.

The next morning a large force went ashore from the Emerald, the graves in the sand were opened, and the body of Claude Cassiday was not found; but the bodies of all the rest of the cutter's crew were there, and they revealed the fact that they had been bruised and battered by being thrown upon the rocks.

Not a spot of the island was left unsearched, and all were convinced that Lieutenant Cassiday had escaped death in some mysterious way.

The graves were deepened, and the names of the crew were painted upon the rocks.

Then the men returned to the ship, which cruised for some days among the islands and then set sail for Cuba, all wondering at the mysterious disappearance of Lieutenant Claude Cassiday, and hoping that he would yet appear, for he was popular with officers and men alike.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ISLAND TREASURE.

The cutter from the Emerald was caught in the first storm that broke among the Bahamas, several hours after leaving the ship, and only the splendid seamanship of Claude Cassiday saved her from being swamped.

He saw the coming storm and under sail and oars ran to the lee of a small island, where the anchor was let go, and a sail stretched over the forward part of the cutter and nailed fast down, to keep her from filling when the seas broke over the bows.

With the aid of four men kept constantly at the aft bars, the anchor held firm, and the little craft rode out the terrific storm, though, but for the lee afforded by the low lying island it would never have been able to do so.

When the hurricane had passed over and the sea had run down, the cutter was put upon its course once more and went bowling swiftly along, the crew feeling that the coolness and skill of their commander alone had saved them.

Claude Cassiday was very glad of the chance to reconnoiter the islands, for did he find a buccaneer retreat, he believed that there he would

find his lost son, as he held strongly to the hope that the boy was not dead.

Searching among the islands for days, they were one afternoon caught in the hurricane, more terrible than the first.

There was nothing to do for it but to scud before it and try and search the shelter of an island before its worst fury came on.

As they neared the island they saw that it was surrounded by a reef, and in vain did they seek an opening through which to reach the shore.

Night was coming on rapidly, the hurricane was momentarily increasing in violence, and the cutter was driven helplessly down upon the breakers.

"Keep in the boat, men, for we may ride over!" sternly ordered Claude Cassiday as they neared the reef.

But a panic had seized the men, and hoping to escape by swimming, they sprung into the sea.

In vain did their lieutenant appeal to them to stand by the boat, for they believed they would be borne over the reef if swimming and thence on to the shore not a couple of cables' length away.

The boat thus lightened by their weight taken from it, for all but Claude Cassiday sprung into the sea, the midshipman being the last to go, rode lightly upon the tops of the waves and driven by the wind passed in safety over the reef.

And the men, once they found themselves in that mad caldron of waters, saw their mistake and in vain battled with the waves and wind for life.

Once the boat had gotten into the quieter waters beyond the surf, Claude Cassiday had seized a pair of oars and been enabled, after the hardest exertion, to get it around the island point, where he threw the anchor overboard, and springing into the sea, swam to the shore.

Along he ran to the shore opposite the point where the men had left the boat, and peered through the darkness for any one who might reach the shore, though he had little hope of seeing any one alive.

Now and then a dark object would strike the shore, and he would drag it out upon the beach to find life had already left the bruised body.

So the night passed away, until the rising sun revealed nearly all of the cutter's crew lying here and there upon the shore.

Through the day the brave officer held his watch, until toward sunset the last one had been dashed ashore, and he alone survived of the cutter's crew.

Then the tired sailor sought rest and food, and slept through the night in the boat still anchored off the shore.

The next morning he began the painful task of burying the dead, digging out the sand in between a pile of rocks with a bayonet and a tin pan used for cooking.

Suddenly he struck a hard substance, and believing it to be a rock, he was about to dig a grave further on, when his eye fell upon an iron band.

He soon uncovered a strong, iron-bound box some three feet long by eighteen inches in height and width.

"I have struck upon a buried treasure! Now I am a rich man!" he cried joyously, as he uncovered the box, and with a piece of rock broke open the lock.

What he beheld nearly paralyzed him with joy, for within were bags of gold and silver in Spanish and English coin, and in bullion, while a small box was filled with jewelry and precious stones.

There were also several short swords with gem-studded hilts, and other articles of value.

"A pirate treasure, as I live! And it is all mine, for not one of my comrades lives to share it with," cried Lieutenant Cassiday, glancing at the bodies of the dead who lay near the spot he had intended for their graves.

So unnerved was the sailor with his discovery that it was a long time before he could resume work.

Then he took everything out of the iron box and carried it to the cutter, then hauled close inshore. Next followed the iron box; and with the treasure removed from his sight he finished digging the graves and cut the names of the dead upon the oar-blade.

Nailing a flag to the oar he fastened it up among the rocks, and on the third morning after his coming ashore hoisted sail upon the cutter and stood out to sea, passing through a break in the reef which he could see plainly in quiet weather.

All day long he held on his course, and at dark sought a haven which he sighted in a large island.

The next morning he landed and began a search for a place where he could securely hide his treasure, for he knew the great risk of carrying it on the cutter should he be picked up by a lawless crew.

The right place was at last found and the box carried ashore and placed in a secure hiding-place.

The treasure next followed and was stowed away in the box, which was then completely hidden and the place marked.

The next act of the officer was to draw a chart

of the island and its position, with the hiding-place of the treasure marked thereon.

This done, he once more set sail.

With his crew gone, provisions and water he had in plenty, and the oars being useless without men to man them, he made a deck over the cutter, using canvas for covering, and thus added to the seaworthiness of the little craft.

Then ready for his cruise in search of the Emerald, he set sail, confident that he could weather a severe blow, should he be caught away from the islands in a storm.

But his search for the Emerald was fruitless, and after a couple of weeks' cruising as he was trying to make the Florida Coast he was picked up off Great Abaco by a merchant brig bound to Vera Cruz.

As the vessel swept in past the frowning fortress of San Juan d'Uloa the young sailor gave an exclamation of delight, for at anchor off Vera Cruz was his own vessel, the sloop-of-war Emerald.

The kind captain of the brig at once sent him aboard in a boat, where he was greeted by rousing cheers from the crew and hearty handshakes from his brother officers.

His report was soon made to Captain Sanford, but a strange impulse to keep in his own heart the secret of the treasure he had found he obeyed, and nothing was said of it to any one.

CHAPTER V.

THE SAILOR'S LEGACY.

"I've got my death-wound, Hartwell, and—"

The one who uttered the words did not finish the sentence, for he reeled and fell heavily, while the one he addressed sprung over his fallen form and, calling to a number of seamen who were in retreat, cried sternly:

"Make a stand here, men, and beat them back, for dead or alive they must not have Lieutenant Cassiday!"

The scene was upon the Mexican Coast, where a party had landed from the American sloop-of-war Emerald to fill her water-casks.

Two boats' crews had come ashore, each under a lieutenant, and while filling the casks from the cool waters of a spring among the mesquite trees a band of Mexican bandits had ridden down upon them.

The Americans had rallied quickly and beaten the outlaws back, but while retreating to their boats the Mexicans had charged again, with a larger force, and Lieutenant Claude Cassiday had, with several seamen, fallen under the hot fire poured upon them at short range.

Finding that his friend was really fatally wounded, Harold Hartwell at once had him taken to a safe position, threw out his men around the place to defend it, and dispatched a middy at full speed to the boats to go off to the Emerald for aid.

"My dear Cassiday, I hope it is not as bad as you fear," said Harold Hartwell, earnestly, as he sat down by his wounded comrade and grasped his hand.

The men were in position a hundred feet away, and at the first alarm of another charge by the bandits, ready to rush to the defense.

"Yes, I have received my death-wound, Hartwell, and I have something to say to you now while I have the strength."

Hartwell made no reply, for he felt that the man who had saved him and his crew that night of storm, who had passed through many dangers, had at last met his doom at the bullets of Mexican bandits.

"You are a poor man, are you not, Hartwell?" asked the dying lieutenant faintly.

"Yes, I have only my pay, Cassiday; but why do you speak of me?"

"Because I owe it to you that I die a commissioned officer of our navy, and you have been my best, my dearest friend."

"I too have been a poor man, Hartwell, but to-day I am a rich one, for I have a secret that but one other knows."

"You remember my going in the cutter six months ago, and I alone surviving?"

"Yes, but too well."

"Well, when I dug the graves of my crew I found an iron box full of treasure."

"Cassiday!"

"I mean it, Hartwell, it was a hidden pirate treasure, and I took it away with me from the island."

"Poor fellow," murmured Hartwell, who felt that the mind of his friend was wandering.

"No, I am not delirious, Hartwell, as you think, for I read your thoughts."

"I did just what I say, and landing upon another island I buried my box, and placed in it the treasure."

"I drew a correct chart of the locality of the island, and the treasure, while there, and only a few weeks ago sent it home to my wife."

"Afterward, I discovered that I had not sent my letter, and intending to rewrite it with other news, I tore it up."

"So my wife has the chart and you know what it means, while she does not."

"To you, therefore, my dear Hartwell, I leave the duty of securing the pirate treasure for my wife and child, and for yourself, for I leave half to you, my good friend."

"No! no! Cassiday, it is all for your wife and child, not for me."

"I say yes, for there is a large fortune in that box, Hartwell, a fortune for the three of you, yes, and for my poor boy Claude if he is ever found, as I believe he will be."

"You are to share the legacy, Hartwell, you having half, and my wife and child the other half, for it devolves upon you to find it, you know."

"Go to my wife, when you return home, tell her of my death, and how I died."

Tell her that you held my hand when death came to me and pledged yourself to fulfill my dying wish.

"Get from her the chart I sent to her, and then go in a chartered schooner to find the treasure, but be careful to know your crew, or your life will be the forfeit."

"I can well understand that, my dear Cassiday; but I sincerely hope that you may live to enjoy your own fortune."

"No, it cannot be," was the sad reply.

"You seem stronger."

"It is the strength only of a dying man, Hartwell; but there is one thing more I would say, my dear friend."

"Yes, Cassiday?"

"Do not tell how the riches came to my wife and to you, for people might regard those I love with unkindness, did they know their fortune was a pirate treasure."

"I will keep the secret faithfully."

"And if you would only try and find my boy, Hartwell, it would be a joy to the heart of his mother and little sister and repay them in part for my loss."

"You will try and find him, Hartwell, for I cannot believe he is dead."

"I will do all in my power to do so," was the earnest reply.

"You must give me your pledge of honor, Harold Hartwell, as an officer and a man, to accept my legacy to you and share it with those I love, and remember your promise is to a dying man," said Cassiday faintly.

"Yes, I shall keep the pledge, my poor friend—but my men are calling," and with a grasp of the hand Hartwell sprang to his feet and dashed to the side of his men, a score in number.

The bandits were coming down in another rush, in compact mass, determined to ride over the sailors.

But the muskets rattle, the pistols cracked, and once more the bandits were beaten off.

Soon after, however, with loud yells, they came on once more, and it was now seen that they had been reinforced largely.

But their yells were answered by cheers from the American seamen coming to the rescue, and Harold Hartwell, also wounded, and his party, were saved.

When he sought the spot where he had left his dying friend, accompanied by the ship's surgeon, he said softly:

"He has sunk to sleep."

"Yes, it is an eternal sleep," said the surgeon, whose fingers rested lightly upon the pulse of Claude Cassiday.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TEMPTRESS.

It was a bitter blow to poor Mrs. Cassiday and little Helen to learn from the lips of Lieutenant Harold Hartwell the sad story of the death of the loved husband and father in far away Mexico.

The lieutenant had returned from his ship on account of his wound, and after visiting the Secretary of the Navy, to make the report sent on by Captain Sanford of the cruise of the Emerald, he had gone for a few days' rest to his own home before visiting the widow and daughter of his friend Cassiday.

Mrs. Hartwell was a married belle, a beautiful, worldly woman, with an ambition to thrive in the world above her fellow-mortals.

She had married Harold Hartwell for his good looks, his rank as an officer of the navy, and because he was the heir of a rich old uncle.

But the rich bachelor uncle married, and dying soon after, left his wife all, and the blow was a severe one to Mrs. Hartwell.

The pay of her husband she got the lion's share of, and she was determined that her little daughter should grow up with the same ambition to make a brilliant match in the world.

Harold Hartwell was completely under the rule of his beautiful wife, and she read him like a book, so soon saw that there was some important secret upon his mind.

In vain did he tell her that she was wrong, for she would not believe him, and at last forced from his lips the whole story of the treasure on the island in the Bahamas.

Then Mrs. Hartwell became pale with suppressed emotion, and began to pace to and fro in deep meditation.

At last she turned to her husband and asked:

"Have not the Cassidays other means of support than the pay of Lieutenant Cassiday?"

"I believe Mrs. Cassiday has an income from property left her by her father."

"Do you know the amount?"

"I think it is a thousand dollars a year."

"And they are but the mother and daughter?"

"Yes."

"And they own their house?"

"They do."

"Hartwell?"

"Well, wife?"

"Do you intend to be a fool?"

"How do you mean?"

"How much is this treasure?"

"I do not know, but it is considerable."

"For one family, yes, but for two it will not amount to so much."

"Of course not."

"Now Mrs. Cassiday knows nothing about it?"

"Nothing."

"But she has the chart of its hiding-place?"

"Yes."

"But has no idea what the chart is?"

"So poor Cassiday told me."

"Hartwell?"

"Well, wife?"

"I do not intend you shall make a fool of yourself in this matter."

"I certainly do not expect to do so."

"I married you when both of us expected to get riches to enjoy life on, and you led me to so believe, and excepting your pay and some prize-money we have had nothing."

"Now this woman and her child are not poor, and they would not know what to do with a fortune, so could not enjoy it."

"What are you aiming at, Celia?" asked the lieutenant, uneasily.

"Just this, Harold, to get all of that fortune."

"Celia?"

"It is not robbing your dead friend of a dollar, for he never had it in his possession where he could use it."

"It was not earned by him, or won by him with his sword, only a treasure buried by pirates and found by him."

"Now his wife has the chart and with it in your possession you can find the treasure."

"You can get it all for yourself, ourselves, and we can live in luxury the remainder of our lives."

The man's face turned pale as the woman tempted him.

Time and again the thought to do this very thing had flashed through his mind, but been quickly banished as unworthy of him.

Then came the tempting of his wife and he listened.

He urged against it all in his power, but he was weak and she was strong, and at last he said in a hesitating way:

"But how can I get the chart from her?"

The woman thought a moment and said:

"The crew of the cutter were buried upon an island?"

"Yes."

"He wrote no explanation with the chart sent home?"

"So he said."

"Then tell her that a chart was sent of the island where the cutter's crew was buried, and that you will be sent there for the bodies of the men."

"She will give it to you, and your fortune is made."

"Yes, by robbing her."

"How can you rob her of what she never possessed?"

"That is true."

"Now make up your mind to go about this business so as to win perfect success."

"But Cassiday hinted that if I did not have the money to fit out a craft to go after the treasure, that his wife had a few thousand in bank which she would advance me."

"There! they are rich you see after all, for I have not a few hundred dollars to call my own."

"But you did get several thousands in my prize-money, Celia."

"Yes, and fortunately put it in jewels which you can sell to raise the money to fit out a craft for this expedition."

"How much will it take?"

"A thousand in charter money for three months, and twice as much for provisions and pay for the men."

"Fortunately I have five thousand dollars worth of jewelry, which you can have."

"You are on leave from your wound, and can get it extended now, so you can have four months for this expedition."

"No one need know where you have gone, and when you return with the treasure we can buy a handsome home in Boston and live in grand style."

"But people will wonder where I got my money?"

"What do you care, and certainly you will not be such a fool as to tell them."

"No!"

"It will be our secret and go with us to the grave, for we must never let Celeste know even when she grows up, she is such a strange child you know."

"Yes, she is a strange child, and it would be just like her, did she know all, to go and give the fortune to Mrs. Cassiday."

"It is just what she would do, and you must cover up your tracks well as it is."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that you must go to some other city to charter a vessel and do so under an assumed name."

"Go to Baltimore in fact, and be very careful as to what men you get for a crew, or you may be killed and the gold be lost."

"You are a wonderful schemer, Celia."

"I am scheming for our future happiness, and in doing so wrong no one, Harold, for the Cassidays are not poor, and they have nothing to regret not knowing of this fortune."

"Very true," was the response, and that night Harold Hartwell made up his mind that the pirate treasure should be all his own.

A few days after he visited the home of his dead friend to whom he had given his pledge of honor, and Mrs. Cassiday and little Helen heard the whole sad story.

When asked about the chart, the weeping woman went and got it, saying she had wondered why her husband had sent it, and thus turned over the legacy left her and her child to the traitor lieutenant.

Two weeks after Harold Hartwell sailed upon his hunt for the pirate treasure.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GOLD-HUNTER.

The sun was just setting behind a pile of inky clouds which, rising rapidly, betokened a storm, as a small schooner of sixty tons burden ran into an inviting harborage of one of the Bahama Islands.

The island was a large one, with rocky shores, hill-land covered with a growth of trees and altogether very desolate looking indeed.

But, with a tempest and night coming on together the little haven into which the schooner was slowly feeling her way was very welcome. Upon the decks of the schooner, which was a trim-working craft, were visible but nine persons, one of whom was a handsome man of thirty, dressed in a sailor suit and tarpaulin.

Two others near, one of whom had the tiller, were evidently his first and second mates, and the others were the crew with the exception of one, who was a negro cook.

It was a small crew with which to venture into the dangerous locality of the Bahamas, but then the craft had a look of being able to run away from a foe without much trouble.

"This would not be a very safe haven, I'm thinking, Captain Harold, with the wind from any other quarter," said the first mate, glancing attentively at the surroundings as under shortened sail the schooner felt her way toward an anchorage.

"Yes, and I hope the storm will not switch around," said the skipper who had been addressed as Captain Harold.

"And I also hope this island is not the resort of any of the Bahama buccaneers," the mate added somewhat anxiously.

"I do not think it can be, as we have seen no sign thus far of life ashore; but I shall be glad when we reach the island I am in search of and can secure the box secreted on it, so we can head for home."

"As I will also be, captain; but you say we should reach there to-morrow?"

"Yes, we ought to anchor there to-morrow night, if my calculations are correct, and I have no reason to doubt them."

"Well, sir, shall I let fall the anchor, for we are about as near the shore as is safe, should the wind switch around and we have to beat out?"

"Yes, let go the anchors and get topmasts hosed and all ready to meet the storm, which I fear will be a very severe one," and Captain Harold turned his gaze upon the rapidly darkening skies.

The anchors were let fall, the topmasts hosed and sails closely furled, so that when, half an hour after, the tempest came howling across the island it found the schooner prepared to meet it.

So severe was the hurricane that for awhile it seemed as though the schooner must break her cables, or drive stern-foremost out to sea dragging her anchors.

But the overhanging rocks of the island broke the force of the tempest, and as the schooner did not feel the full force of the waves she rode out the gale, which abated at midnight and her crew sought a much needed rest.

The first mate alone was on watch, and as the wind died down to a balmy breeze he leant over the bulwarks and sunk to sleep.

How little he dreamed that it was his last sleep, for he was slumbering peacefully, unmindful of danger near.

The clouds drifted away, the stars came out in silvery beauty and the roar of the sea breaking upon the other end of the island half a mile away alone broke the stillness of the night.

Suddenly out of the shadow of the rocks came a boat.

It was long and low in the water and came noiselessly toward the schooner, urged by muffled oars.

It was full of men, and must hold a score at least.

Silently it came on and very slowly, like a tiger creeping upon its prey.

No hail came from on board the schooner, no eye there saw the coming danger, for the mate slept serenely on.

The boat touched the schooner forward, but made no sound, and over the bulwarks crept one, two, three human forms until the crew of the boat had reached the vessel's deck.

Still no alarm was given and noiselessly they stole aft until the form of the mate was seen.

Just then he changed his position slightly in a half-waking way, and instantly came the flash of a pistol, a ringing report, and the mate dropped dead upon the decks.

A bullet had pierced his brain and his sleep had continued into eternity.

Thus the alarm was sounded by the death of the watchman of the schooner, and instantly the crew were aroused to action and resistance.

Out of the cabin and the steerage came men to fight for their lives, for half-undressed though they were they came with arms in their hands.

And they were met by the silent boarders from the island, with shots and yells, and a fierce struggle was begun upon the schooner's deck, the Gold Hunter of Harold Hartwell.

But the boarders were double the number of the crew of the treasure-hunting craft, and they had the advantage of a surprise as well, a surprise which had begun with the death of the mate.

At last a cry for quarter was heard, followed by the ringing words:

"No, fight to the death, men, or our cruise is useless.

"Beat them into the sea and we will yet win!"

The speaker was "Captain Harold," as he was known upon the schooner, and he fought like a madman at bay.

"Do not kill that man, for he has a secret that we must know!" cried the leader of the boarders, and calling to a number of his men he rushed upon Harold Hartwell.

One, two men fell, but it was of no avail, his magnificent courage, and he was thrown to the deck and bound by the boarders who threw themselves bodily upon him.

"Senor, you and four of your men are my prisoners.

"The others, dead and wounded, I shall throw into the sea, but *you I will spare for your secret*," said the leader of the midnight boarders of the Gold-Hunter.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ALTERNATIVE.

THEY were a hard-looking lot of men, the captors of the schooner of Harold Hartwell, and they were nearly wild with joy over their victory.

Half a dozen of their number had fallen, but these men thought so little of that, their bodies were thrown over with the dead and wounded of the crew of the schooner.

Hartwell and his few men, the sole survivors, were bound, laid upon the decks and a boy armed with a musket was set to guard them.

Then the captors set to work to see what the result of their victory was, and daylight dawned to find them still investigating.

At length the leader, a dark-faced Spaniard with the look of a born cut-throat, came up to where the boy was guarding the prisoners and said sharply:

"You are the captain, senor?"

"I was," responded Hartwell, whose heart was full of despair.

"You have a fine little vessel."

"I had."

"The very craft for these waters, stiff and fleet I'll warrant, or her build deceives her."

"She is a good enough craft."

"How many in crew?"

"Those you killed and we who remain."

"About a dozen; but where is your cargo?"

"We have none."

"You are in ballast?"

"Yes."

"Where from?"

"The United States."

"That is a vague answer, senor."

"From Baltimore, then."

"Whither bound?"

"On a trading voyage."

"With no cargo to trade?"

"I expected to find a cargo."

"What could you find among these islands, senor?"

Hartwell's face flushed, and he replied:

"Oh, anything that was for sale."

"Ah! then you have the money with you to buy?"

Again the face of the captive officer flushed, for he felt that he had gotten into trouble.

"No, I had no money with me."

The Spaniard laughed and replied:

"A trader without merchandise or money."

"That won't do, senor."

After a while he added:

"Now I know just why you came here."

"Well?"

"Your vessel, without freight, and your com-

ing without money, with your words to your crew all tell me that you have been in these waters before and come only for a treasure, something you have learned the hiding-place of, or buried here when on a former voyage.

"I am right, senor."

Hartwell bit his lips with vexation, while he could not but give the fellow credit for wonderfully good powers of perception.

To change the subject, he asked:

"Who are you?"

"A pirate."

"I thought so."

"Yes, I belong to the Bahama Buccaneers, and am in command of our island retreat, which just now happens to be this place, for we do not stay long in any one isle."

"Where is your vessel?"

"This one is mine now, having captured it; but we have a cruiser out now at work, under our chief, and she is expected soon and I will be glad to show my prize to my captain."

"You keep no vessel here, then?"

"No, for you see we buccaners have not any too much confidence in each other, and our captain leaves us ashore as a guard to the treasure, you know, which is considerable."

"Having no vessel we cannot run off with it, you see."

"Yes, I see you are a lot of sea cut-throats who cannot much longer keep up your lawless acts."

"That remains to be seen, senor; but now let us discuss your situation."

"I am wholly at your mercy."

"Oh, yes, but we shall see how it will come out, senor."

"Now tell me why you are in these waters?"

"I told you."

"No, you told me what reason proves is not so."

"Well, then, I am pirate-hunting."

"Not with an unarmed craft and a dozen men, senor."

"You do not believe me whatever I may say."

"I know that all points to one thing."

"Well?"

"You are treasure-hunting, and I am open to negotiations with you."

"How do you mean?"

"Tell me where the treasure is and you shall have your life and a snug sum in return."

"I cannot trust you."

"You can, and you must, for if you do not tell me I shall take your life, for there is no law in these islands, senor."

"I have no treasure to share with you," was the morose reply.

"See here, senor, I make the proposition to you, and I will give you just three days to consider it."

"If you accept my terms you get some gold and your life."

"If you refuse, then I shall make the same offer to your men yonder, until I find one who will sell out," and the buccaneer pointed to the men forward, for they had been led there preparatory to being sent ashore.

"They can tell you nothing if their lives depended upon it," said Hartwell.

"Well, it may be so, and if so you are the one to save your life."

"I give you the time I said, so now go ashore and get your breakfast with your men, and when you decide, send me word," and with a few words to the boy who still acted as guard, the Spaniard turned away.

Hartwell was at once told to march, by the boy, who took him to where the other prisoners were and all went ashore in a boat.

Upon the island they found in a glen half a dozen cabins and some score more of people, more than half of them being women and children who seemed delighted at beholding the prisoners.

To a cabin apart from the others the prisoners were taken by a man and the boy, and the door was barred upon them.

The man then went away leaving the boy on duty as guard, and as Hartwell glanced out of the iron-grated window, he said:

"Senor, you and your men be ready to do as I tell you, and I'll try and aid you to escape."

Hartwell started and glanced earnestly at the boy.

He was a lad of twelve years of age about, with a lithe form and a face darkly bronzed, bold and handsome.

His hair hung in curling waves upon his shoulders, and he was dressed in a jaunty sailor suit and seemed to take pride in looking his best.

He had before spoken in Spanish, but now he addressed Hartwell in perfect English.

"Boy, you are no Spaniard," said the lieutenant.

"Never mind what I am, senor, only be ready to do what I tell you, for I will try to help you to escape, hard as it looks to do," and the boy shouldered his musket and walked out of ear-shot from the cabin, as though determined to say no more.

But, boy though he was, what he had said, as well as his fearless, determined look, gave hope to Harold Hartwell that their case was not as

desperately hopeless as it looked, and turning to his comrades he said:

"Men, you heard what the boy said, so stand ready to take advantage of any aid he may give us."

CHAPTER IX.

THE BOY RESCUER.

THE boy seemed to have been set to look after the prisoners, for he brought them their meals, water from the spring and kept the key of the cabin door.

The cabin was a stout one, built of ship's timbers and had been intended as a lock up, or jail.

It had a heavy door which was barred on the outside and locked, and two windows on either side, small and iron-grated.

There were bunks in it for sleeping, a table and couple of benches, and this was all.

When the boy came with the supper for the prisoners, he drew from beneath his clothing a saw and said quickly:

"Hide it."

Then he handed over an auger with the same advice, while he slipped into the hand of Harold Hartwell a piece of closely folded paper.

The supper of fish, bread and coffee held no charms for Hartwell, so he turned to see what the paper said, while his men ate the meal the boy had brought them.

Written in a boyish scrawling hand Hartwell read:

"The island chief will come to see you to-morrow so tell him you will take him to the treasure the next day if he will go in the schooner."

"There is a small sloop on the island, hidden in a basin among the rocks, and to-morrow night I will come and guide you there."

"It is of ten tons and kept provisioned, while it sails well."

"I will escape with you, for the pirates will kill me if they suspect I helped you."

"Use the auger and saw to cut a hole in the rear of the cabin, where the third bunk is, and keep it hidden with a blanket."

Over and over again Hartwell read the lines, and then he told his comrades just what their hope of escape was.

They talked it all over together and felt the deepest gratitude to the brave boy, for they well knew, after what they had seen the buccaners do with their wounded comrades, that their lives were worthless in their eyes and they would put them to death unless the hiding-place of the treasure was divulged.

This the men did not know, and felt that their doom was sealed unless their captain made it known.

As for Hartwell the saving of his life only would make him give up his secret of the treasure, to get which he had been tempted to turn traitor to the wife and child of the man who had saved his life over two years before.

He had left the chart at home, after having copied it over and over again, with all its notes and instructions until he could draw it perfectly from memory.

At the last moment he could yield and save his life by giving up his secret, he felt.

And yet the thought would come upon him that he might even then be put to death.

Was he to lose after all the fortune which he had turned traitor to get?

At the second visit of the boy he left another note which read:

"They intend to get your secret and then kill you all."

"I will release you to-night, and will try and fix the schooner so that she cannot follow you to-morrow."

The prisoners were all excitement now, though they were forced to be outwardly calm.

They fully realized their danger, their desperate situation, and that all depended upon a boy of twelve or thirteen years of age.

So they contained themselves as best they could while the hours dragged slowly away.

The boy appeared with the supper for the prisoners, but when he set it down his finger went to his lips in token of silence.

Then he stepped to the bunk he had indicated in his note and saw that the prisoners had worked well, two of them keeping watch the while.

Auger-holes had been bored in the stout timbers, so as to get the saw in, and the logs had been cut through to make a space large enough for a man to crawl through.

Thus cut the logs could be pushed out when the time came for the prisoners to escape.

Leaving the five men their supper the boy departed without a word, and glancing from the window Harold Hartwell saw that the officer of the island force was with him and took the key of the cabin himself.

Soon after night came on and the men sat down in the darkness to await their deliverance.

The minutes crept by at a snail's pace, and they became nervous from suspense.

But at last came a tap in the rear of the cabin and Hartwell asked in a whisper:

"Who is it?"

"It's me—come."

The answer was in the voice of the boy, and

Hartwell pushed hard upon the pieces of sawn timber, and they fell outside.

Then he crawled through, and the men followed.

There stood the boy awaiting them, and he led the way quickly around the bluff into a pine thicket, and along a ridge running across the island.

He seemed to know the path well in spite of the darkness, and at last came to a spot where he halted upon a cliff.

In the starlight the men saw several long and heavy pieces of timber put across a chasm, and below them hung a small sloop, hauled up from the water beneath by blocks and tackle.

"If it was rough weather you could not get out," said the boy, and he walked coolly out upon one of the pieces of timber and skipped down a rope to the deck.

"You will have to lower at the four ropes together, and I greased the blocks awhile ago so that they will not creak.

"Once in the water, you can row out, and the oars are muffled."

"You are a brave boy, and shall be well rewarded for this," said Harold Hartwell.

"Oh! I'm glad to save your lives, senor, and then I have my reward in the sloop, for their treasure the buccaneers always keep on board ready to escape with, you see, and I will claim that."

"Oh, I see; and the treasure is on board, is it?"

"Yes, sir, and I'd be awful glad to take it home with me; but if you did not have any, I'd share it with you all, of course.

"Now I must go and cut the cable of the schooner, for when aboard to-day I fixed it so that it could be done, and the tide will run her aground on the spit, so they cannot get her off until the next high tide."

"I see; but why did you not do so before?"

"I could not go off to her until the men had gone to bed.

"It will only take half an hour, senor, and it had better be done, for the wind is light, and if the buccaneers follow, we might not escape them, you know."

"All right, my lad; but be careful not to let them discover you, and so prevent our escape."

"If they do I will be the first one they will kill, senor," was the response of the lad, and he walked back upon the cliff and stole away in the darkness.

Hardly had he disappeared when Harold Hartwell said:

"Men, we dare not take the risk to wait.

"Lower away at your ropes, and we'll get the sloop into the water and be off."

"But it won't be right, sir, to desert the lad who has saved us."

"Do as I order you," was the stern response of the treacherous man.

CHAPTER X.

THE DISCOVERY.

WHEN he left the secret basin, over which hung the little sloop, the lad made his way through the thickets by a path which he seemed to know well, and came out upon one of the rocky arms which formed the harbor of the island.

In the glen, an eighth of a mile away, slept the buccaneers, as usual retiring under the influence of a debauch.

The schooner lay at anchor a cable's length from the shore, and as there was no danger anticipated of her being cut out, only two men slept on board.

These two had played cards and drank wine until nearly midnight, in the cabin, when they sunk into a drunken slumber.

The lad undressed himself upon the shore, and taking from the rocks, where he had previously concealed it, a sharpened cutlass, he hung it about his neck, and swam out to the schooner, not daring to take a boat.

The schooner was anchored by one cable only, yet this was a stout one, and she had out some thirty fathoms.

Reaching the cable the lad, with the cutlass hanging about his neck, climbed easily up to the schooner's bow, and sat there a moment, watching the vessel's deck.

Then he glided aft noiselessly, and glancing down into the cabin, heard the hard breathing of the two men.

Going forward again he set to work with his cutlass, using it like a saw, and began to cut the strands of rope.

He had sharpened the cutlass well and it was not a very long task to cut through the cable, when, with a small rope he lowered it into the sea to prevent the splash should it fall.

The tide was running out hard, but there was an eddy the boy well knew, which would carry the schooner into a shallow cove and ground her, and not out to sea.

Once grounded there she could not be gotten off until high tide again, and that would give the fugitives fully twenty-one hours' start.

Over the bows the daring boy went now, letting himself down by the small rope, and he swam rapidly shoreward though the tide set strong against him.

As he reached the rocky arm where he had

left his clothing, he saw the schooner drifting toward the shallow cove.

Hastily he dressed himself and upon reaching the ridge gave a last look toward the schooner.

"She has grounded in the cove," he said to himself, and at a trot he started by the path leading across the island to the secret basin over which the sloop was kept, running in between the two cliffs.

He reached the spot and could hardly keep from giving a shout of joy at feeling that at last he could escape from the hated buccaneers.

Out upon the center timber he ran, expecting to find the sloop below, all ready in the water for her flight.

In spite of his caution a cry broke from his lips when he discovered that the sloop was not there.

"She has gone!" he said with a moan.

Then he ran back upon the cliff and mounted to a rock which commanded a view of the sea on that side of the island.

There, a mile away he beheld the white sails of the sloop as they were set, after the oars had taken the boat out that far.

"Ah! they have deserted me!"

"It was cruel in them to leave me here among the buccaneers, who will kill me for rescuing them," cried the poor lad.

"They did not wait for me!"

"No! not they went at once, for I was not gone long.

"Ah! what shall I do?"

The poor boy burst into tears as he uttered the words, for the cruel treatment he had received from those whose lives he had saved now overcame him.

But he did not weep long, for suddenly he darted away toward the camps.

Passing the lockup he crept down among the cabins and stole into one of them just as loud cries came from the harbor.

In spite of their debauch the buccaneers slept lightly and the cries from the harbor awoke several of the men who quickly turned out.

The Island Captain as he was called, was one of the first to awaken and he quickly, as he believed, aroused the boy who shared his cabin with him.

"Quick Pinto, something has gone wrong."

"Get up!" he cried with a rough grasp of the lad's shoulder.

The boy sprung from his bunk, drew on his clothes and ran out with the Island Captain, who with others was hastening toward the harbor.

"*Caramba!* the schooner is gone!" cried the first one to obtain a view of the harbor.

"Go and see if the prisoners are in the cabin, Pinto."

"Here is the key," roared the buccaneer captain, and the lad bounded away.

When he returned with his report that the men had cut their way out of the cabin, one of the men had just arrived in the schooner's boat and told that the cable had been cut and the craft had drifted ashore and grounded.

"Where is your comrade?" roared the buccaneer officer.

"On the schooner, sir?"

"And the prisoners?"

"We have seen no one, senor."

"Sound the alarm at once and have lanterns gotten to search the island."

"They must be taken, men, but not slain, for they hold a secret we must know," shouted the outlaw captain.

A dozen lanterns were soon flashing about the island, and at last a great howl came from some of the buccaneers who had made a discovery.

"The treasure sloop is gone!" arose the cry.

The outlaw captain soon knew that such was the case, and he told the boy to call all the people in and order boats ready to go off to the schooner, which must be gotten off the bar and go in chase.

The lad obeyed the order promptly, and soon after the schooner was surrounded with boats filled with the buccaneers.

Every effort was made to float her, but in vain, for the tide had left her too hard aground to move her from where she struck.

The lad had planned and executed well, for the fugitives had escaped in the treasure sloop and the schooner could not be made the means of recapturing them.

But for this the boy knew that the sloop could have been overhauled.

There was no other craft on the island, only small fishing-boats and a yawl, and to pursue any distance from the island in these would be madness.

The dawn came and found the buccaneers still striving to float the schooner.

Then the captain rowed back to the island, ordering all to follow.

He had seen where the stout cable had been cut, and he knew that there was a traitor in their midst.

To discover him was the next thing to be done and his punishment should quickly follow.

CHAPTER XI.

SELF-SACRIFICE.

HAVING ordered all of the buccaneers, women and children as well as men, to assemble at the

cabins, the captain called to the lad to accompany him and went to the island lookout, where by day a watch was always kept.

It commanded a view of the sea upon every side, and as the two reached the rock the lad cried:

"There is the sloop, senor!"

"Yes, and the traitor who as betrayed us shall die," was the stern rejoinder of the man.

The lad's face did not move a muscle at the threat.

He would accept the alternative if it came, and he took the situation with the utmost coolness.

"Who do you suspect, senor?" he asked.

"Several."

"Perhaps the one who helped them may have gone with them, senor."

"Ah! that may be so; but I shall soon know."

He saw that a fair breeze was blowing and that the little sloop was several leagues away and would soon disappear from sight.

Retracing his way he went by the lock-up and saw that the prisoners had cut their way out with tools taken from those belonging to the shop on the island.

"It is a traitor's work, Pinto, and he shall soon regret his treachery," he said savagely, and the boy answered innocently:

"Yes, senor, I guess he will."

Arriving at the cabins the buccaneers were all found assembled, some thirty men, some of whom were crippled, and a score of women and children.

"Call the roll, Pinto," commanded the chief, and the boy obeyed.

Not one failed to step forward as his, or her name was called by the lad, and pass over to one side until all had answered.

The lad began with the name of the captain and ended with his own, answering to the last in a cheery tone, which he did not feel:

"Here!"

The captain cast his eyes over the crowd and said sternly:

"You all know that the five prisoners we held here have escaped."

"We captured their fine vessel, and are aware they came to the Bahamas in search of some treasure they knew the hiding-place of."

"This vessel and the treasure I was in hopes of turning over to our chief upon his return; but now it is ashore and perhaps damaged, and our prisoners have escaped, carrying with them our sloop in which is all the treasure of our land."

"Them prisoners cut their way out with tools furnished them by some one who has access to the island work-shop, and the same one guided them across the island to the secret hiding-place of our treasure sloop."

"Now, who is the traitor?"

A dead silence followed the question of the Island Captain.

The people looked at each other and then at their chief, until the silence became painful.

At length one of the buccaneers spoke, and he was a man feared by all and watched by the Island Captain.

He was a man of violent temper, hateful in manner, and he always was cruel toward Pinto the lad, simply because the latter did not stand in the awe of him which he wished him to do and would not be his slave.

Now the man, whose name was Miguel Santo, glanced wickedly toward the lad and said:

"You couldn't trust us, captain, so made that boy the guard of the prisoners, and if you did not have the key of the lock-up he did."

"I had the key, Santo, and the prisoners cut their way out through the rear timbers of the cabin."

"The boy has the run of the workshop."

"Oh yes, as all have; but I see your game."

"Well, senor?"

"You wish to lay the guilt upon the boy to hide your own act."

"Be careful, Senor Captain."

"I mean what I say, for you did not play cards or drink last night, and you were seen going into your cabin about midnight."

"I had been fishing, senor."

"Well, I charge you with being the traitor, and that you released the prisoners, and more, I believe that before doing so you got a large quantity of the treasure off the sloop and hid it for your own use hereafter."

"Senor Captain, you make this charge against me because you fear me, and have heard it hinted that our chief will make me commander of the island upon his return here."

"It is false, the chief has no confidence in you and told me to keep my eye upon you."

"Men, this man, Miguel Santo, is the traitor and he shall die now for his crime and I stand responsible to the chief for my act."

"Seize and bind him, men!"

Miguel Santo had evidently not expected such quick action upon the part of the Island Captain, for he was caught wholly off his guard.

The men nearest to him had thrown themselves upon him ere he could offer any resistance and others at once sprung to obey the command of the Island Captain.

With men following the lawless lives they

did, a traitor in their midst was one to at once kill as they would a snake.

They depended upon their holding together for their safety, for one traitor could bring them all to the gallows, or yard-arm, they well knew.

In vain was it that Miguel Santo struggled, for he was quickly bound and a rope was put about his neck.

"*Caramba!* would you hang an innocent man, comrades, for I swear to you I am no traitor," he cried, excitedly, for well he saw the humor of the crowd.

"I make the charge, and I stand the responsibility."

"Miguel Santo, you shall have just time to utter a prayer before I give the order for you to die."

Miguel Santo uttered a bitter oath, and then instantly realizing his position and that there was no hope for him, crossed himself devoutly and murmured a prayer.

"Now, men, the time is up, and—"

"Hold, senior!"

The speaker was Pinto the lad, and though his face was very pale it was fearless and determined as he stepped before the Island Captain.

"Well, lad, speak out and lose no time."

"This man is not guilty, senior."

"Ha! what do you mean?" and as the Island Captain turned toward the youth the very eye was upon him.

"I mean what I say, senior, Miguel Santo is not guilty, and I say it though he has ever been cruel toward me."

"Boy, do you know who is guilty?"

"I do, senior."

"Who is he?"

"I am, senior," was the reply of the lad, and he uttered the words firmly and fearlessly now.

CHAPTER XII.

MIGUEL SANTO.

A STRANGE murmur ran around the crowd at the confession of the boy.

It was of mingled admiration at his self-sacrificing confession and amazement at the fact of his guilt.

That he should admit that he was the one who had done the deed, when all believed it to have been Miguel Santo, and he would have been hanged for it, no one present could understand, especially as the Spaniard had been the lad's worst foe.

But rather than see another die for his act, be that man whom he might, Pinto had fearlessly confessed his guilt.

The Island Captain looked at him in almost awe, while the crowd, excepting the murmur that was heard, remained silent.

Miguel Santo for a moment looked very uneasy, seeming more nervous than when he expected to be put to death a few moments before.

At last some one of the crowd asked:

"Well, captain, are you not going to bang the boy?"

The Island Captain started at the question, for he did not know what was before him.

If he refused what would be the result?

So he said:

"The boy is guilty by his own confession, and will doubtless have to die when the chief returns."

"But the chief left him to my care and said that upon my life there was to be no harm befall him, so I will not order him to be put to death."

Some were glad at this, for the boy was generally popular; but there were others who demurred.

The act of the lad had robbed them of their treasure and enabled five prisoners to escape who might bring down upon them a cruiser at any time.

He had shown such manly pluck, such skill and coolness in the rescue, and beaching of the schooner to prevent pursuit, that he was a dangerous person, young as he was, to have in their midst.

So some of the buccaneers longed to see the lad put to death and cried out against the decision of the Island Captain.

As for Miguel Santo he stepped forward quickly and laid his hand heavily upon the shoulder of the lad, while he said hoarsely:

"Captain, I nearly lost my life for this boy's act, and though I agree with you that he must be kept for the chief to punish as best suits him, and we know that he loves to kill, I demand that the youngster be too well secured to escape, and I shall put the irons upon him."

The act of Pinto toward Miguel Santo had not softened the heart of that villain, and as Captain Marco offered no remonstrance he added:

"Do you deny my right, captain, to see that the boy is secure?"

"No, take him to the lock-up, and see to it that the place is made secure again."

"I'll do it," and the huge buccaneer fairly dragged the lad through the crowd up to the prison den.

There were a number of manacles there, anklets and handcuffs, with chains attached, and

Miguel Santo seemed very careful in his selection of those to put upon the lad.

Pinto offered no resistance, for he knew that it was utterly useless, and the irons were placed upon ankles and wrists, and then the chains made fast to a bolt in the cabin timbers.

No giant madman could have been ironed more heavily than this slender boy.

Then the hole which had been made by Harold Hartwell and his men was filled in and made secure, after which Santo with a wicked chuckle went away, locking the door behind him.

All that day the buccaneers would go to the grated window and look in upon the lad, who nodded pleasantly as he recognized the different ones.

If alarmed at the fate all felt was in store for him, he failed to show his fear.

His supper was brought by one of the women, and Miguel Santo attended her to let her in and out of the cabin.

Then darkness came, and the whole male force of buccaneers went over in boats to the stranded schooner, and began the work of getting her off on the incoming tide.

It was not until after midnight that she was floated, and the cheer of the buccaneers awoke the young prisoner, and told him of their success.

It also proved that the schooner could hardly hope to overhaul the sloop, which soon he hoped would be done, as the fugitives had so cruelly deserted him.

As though to atone for his false accusation of Miguel Santo, Captain Marco left him in command of the island while he took two-thirds of the men in the schooner, in pursuit of the sloop.

The night after their departure Pinto was awakened by a noise at the door of the lock-up.

The key turned in the lock, and soon a step was heard within.

"Who is there?" asked the lad.

"Sh, boy, make no sound."

"I owe to your good heart my life, and I won't see you die when you had the pluck to say you were guilty, when I would have been hanged for it."

"I treated you roughly to avoid suspicion, but I did not expect so good a chance to help you out."

The manacles you wear will slip over your small hands and feet, and the end of the bench will bend out one of the irons in the window, so that you could squeeze your little form through, but you can go out of the door, to leave the impression that you got out of the grating.

"I carried a whale-boat, with sails, oars, and a month's provisions, around to the secret basin to-night, so go there and slide down a rope into it, and clear out."

"It will be supposed that you stole it from the harbor."

"I know you to be a sailor of knowledge, far beyond your years, so with the compass in the boat, and a chart, you can find your way; but my advice is for you to go slow; row from island to island by night, hiding by day."

"It is your only chance to escape, and if you fail I will at least have done my part."

"Now go, lad, for I desire to shut up this den and get back to my cabin, and I wish you good luck."

"No! no! I don't want any thanks, only a grasp of your hand—there! Now be off, boy, for it is just six hours before daybreak."

The boy did grasp the hand of the man whom he had believed so cruel, and sped rapidly away toward the secret basin.

The whale-boat was there—a stanch boat it was, too, decked two-thirds over, and with two stump masts and bowsprit.

Seizing the oars, which were muffled, he rowed rapidly away from the island until the breeze blew strong; then he ran up his three sails, and went back to the tiller, shaping his course as though he knew just where to head.

As his hand touched the carved head of the tiller it came in contact with a swinging object.

Upon examination it proved to be a bag of gold, which Miguel Santo had placed there for him, determined that the boy should not land penniless in whatever port he might make.

"Miguel Santo is the best bad man I ever knew," said Pinto, as he brushed a tear from his eye, called up by the kindness of the buccaneer who had aided his escape from the island.

CHAPTER XIII.

REVEALED BY A MINIATURE.

ONE pleasant afternoon, years before the opening of this story, a small packet schooner was running into Boston Harbor before a stiff breeze, and heading for her wharf at the foot of one of the main streets of the city.

Upon her decks were a number of passengers, all glad to have escaped the dangers of the sea, which in those days were not alone from the elements, for the pirate flag was often seen along the coast.

Among the passengers was a young man in sailor garb, with sun-burned face as though just off a long cruise.

He did not belong to the schooner's crew, but had returned in a vessel-of-war from foreign seas, and was on his way home after an absence of two years.

His was a handsome face, and his form was athletic and graceful, while he wore an expression of joy at the thought of soon seeing those he loved.

As the schooner swept further up the harbor the wind increased, blowing in puffs, and all were watching a sail-boat containing two persons, which was hastening for an anchorage but carrying too much sail for safety.

As the schooner swept by a severe puff came, and it seemed to fairly lift the little pleasure-boat from the water and throw her over.

The two occupants, a young man and a maiden; were thrown into the sea and swept apart, and all heard the cry of the former:

"Save her, for I cannot swim!"

But the young sailor had already leaped into the sea and had grasped the maiden about her slender waist, while with a few swift strokes he reached the upturned craft and bade her catch firm hold while he went to the aid of the gentleman.

She obeyed, and the bold swimmer reached her companion just as he was sinking for the last time.

Ere he had regained the upturned pleasure craft the schooner had come to, a boat had been lowered and the maiden had been taken into it.

Then it pulled hard for the brave rescuer and his now unconscious charge.

A few moments more and all were in the cabin of the schooner.

The sailor quickly changed his clothing, and returning to the cabin found the young man returning to consciousness, while the maiden stood near him.

Seeing him, she turned and grasped his hands, while she cried:

"Oh, sir, you saved my brother and myself from death, and our hearts' full gratitude is yours."

The young sailor blushed like a school-girl, and stooping picked up a locket which had dropped upon the floor, the ribbon having broken which held it about the neck of the man who had so nearly lost his life.

"It is my brother's, sir; a miniature of the lady to whom he is engaged," said the maiden.

She started at the sudden paleness of his face, and heard the winds break through his shut teeth, as though in anguish of heart.

"My God! engaged to her—Helen Marcy?"

Then he turned and hastily left the cabin, and when the packet touched the dock he leaped ashore and disappeared in the crowd.

An hour after, he cautiously returned, and the skipper's eyes falling upon him, he called out:

"Hello, Mr. Cassidy, you are the most modest young man I ever knew, to run off from a pretty girl as you did."

"That was a plucky act of yours, and you saved them both as I will swear, and they know, for they were loud in their praises of you."

"But why did you run away?"

"I hate thanks, Captain True, and only did my duty," was the modest reply, and he added:

"I have come for my traps."

"Well, they asked who you were and I told them, for the young man came around all right, and they went home in a carriage."

"Who are they, captain?"

"The son and daughter of the rich old shipping merchant, Adam Curtis."

"The girl is a beauty, as you saw; but the boy is a wild one, and has cost his father a fortune to pay his debts."

"He was in the navy as a midshipman, but killed one of the seamen in a temper, and only influence saved him from prison, or worse; but he was allowed to resign and come home, but is a high-flyer, they say; but you don't look well, and the hard swim was too much for you."

"I don't feel exactly well, Captain True; but I will be all right soon, and I wish to thank you for your kindness to me in the trip from Baltimore."

"Don't speak of it, my lad; but do you know I had to tell young Curtis who you were, and he said that you would not be forgotten for your noble act."

"I hope that does not mean that he intends to reward me, for I should take that with bad grace, from any man."

"I hinted as much, Cassidy, while I said that if the old merchant's influence could get you a commission in the navy it would be the genteel thing, and the young lady, Miss Kate, said that it was just what a man of your pluck should have; but you are anxious to be off, I see, so good-by," and with a warm shake of the hand, Claude Cassidy left the packet followed by a cart carrying his traps.

CHAPTER XIV.

PUT TO THE TEST.

THE young sailor made his way to a sailor's inn, put his traps there and sauntered out into the street.

His home was at a little seaport village some leagues down the coast, to which he could only get a packet, or coach each week, and he would have a couple of days to wait in Boston before his departure.

But he had counted on this and expected to

have the time pass pleasantly in the company of his lady-love.

When he had sailed for foreign seas two years before, he had left with the promise from his sweet-heart to become his wife upon his return.

Misfortune in a financial way had made the Cassidays poor, though no family in the land could boast of prouder lineage, and the young sailor had been proud to win his way in the world by the sweat of his brow.

He had saved the lives of his lady-love and her father one night in a burning inn, and thus had met the one whom he so dearly loved, and with the consent of her parents had become engaged to her.

They knew who he was and greatly admired the handsome young sailor lover of their daughter.

The family were rich, and the father of the young girl had said he preferred a poor son-in-law to a rich one, and that he had wealth enough for both and would be glad to have younger shoulders upon whom to shift the cares of his estate.

But unlooked for adversity befell the rich man, several of his ventures in speculation went wrong, a ship uninsured was lost and other misfortunes, which always crowd in together, came to sweep away his fortune.

In their distress the mother began to look about for a rich son-in-law to retrieve their falling fortunes.

If their daughter would only wed a man of wealth, and she had such visitors by the score, then her father could recuperate his losses and again get upon his feet, so to speak.

Just at this time a young man asked for the hand of their daughter and seemed terribly in earnest.

His family was above reproach, and they were known as being among the wealthiest in the great commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The sister of the visitor had been the school-mate of their daughter, and it was said that both she and her brother would have an enormous fortune.

So the parents of the maiden forgot about the absent lover and took the matter of the proposal into consideration.

They talked it over together and at last decided that it was the only thing that would save them from poverty, for of course the young man would bring a fortune for his wife which her father could invest properly.

Such was their idea, and the subject was placed before the young girl.

At first she was shocked and vowed she would not marry other than the one to whom she was pledged.

Her parents urged that this new visitor was a very handsome man, very rich and she dearly loved his sister.

But she urged that he had led a very fast life, had been forced to resign from the navy, possessed an ungovernable temper and was said to be a gambler and spendthrift.

They told him of what their daughter said, and in his turn he denied the charges against him, promised to do all that was asked of him and become a model man.

Still the maiden refused, for she would be true to her first love, though conscious that her parents had some deep motive unknown to her for wishing to have her break off with the one she loved.

Then they came out and told the truth, and begged her to save them from poverty in their old age.

A noble girl, a dutiful daughter, she yielded, and became engaged to one to whom she felt she was selling herself.

Such was the story of Helen Marcy's engagement to Kent Curtis, and the miniature which she had had painted for the one she loved, her new lover had begged from her and wore about his neck, for he did most fondly love her.

And up to the home of the Marcys went Claude Cassiday, on the day of his rescue of the sister and brother, who were sailing up to the harbor in their little pleasure boat, from their country home upon the bay, where they had been for a day or two.

Slowly along the road went Claude Cassiday, his face pale, his look one of anxiety, when suddenly a horseman overtook him, glanced a second time as he was passing, and, coming to a halt, sprang to the ground.

"Ah! my dear sir, I am more than happy to meet you, for I recognize you as the bold rescuer of my sister and myself a few hours ago."

"My name is Kent Curtis, and, like you, I am a sailor, or was."

He held out his hand in a friendly way and yet Claude Cassiday did not take it.

His face paled and flushed for a moment, but then he said frankly:

"Mr. Curtis, pardon me for what I say to you, but when you were on board the schooner I saw a miniature which you wear, one of Miss Helen Marcy, and your sister said that you were engaged to her."

"May I ask if this is true?"

"It is sir," was the cold reply.

"When I left on a voyage two years ago Miss Marcy was pledged to become my wife upon my return, and knowing her as I do, I can hardly

believe that she has broken with me without some good cause.

"May I ask you, as I am now on my way to visit Miss Marcy, to accompany me there and ask her if I am cast aside for you?"

"If she tells me that such is the case, I will at once yield my claim to you, sir, and forever remove myself from her path and yours."

"I am on my way also, sir, to the home of Miss Marcy, and I shall abide by her decision as you ask it," was the confident response of Kent Curtis.

So on together these two men, so strangely met, so strangely allied, went to the home of Helen Marcy.

She saw them coming, from where she was seated upon the piazza and she could hardly believe her own sight.

Her father had come home and told her of the narrow escape of Kent Curtis and his sister, and their rescue by a young sailor just home from a voyage.

Now she knew who had been the rescuer, and while she became deadly pale she yet remained calm.

She greeted Kent Curtis first and congratulated him upon his rescue, and then turned to her first lover and held both her hands while she said:

"Welcome back, Claude, and it is just like you to be ever doing some noble act," and her voice faltered.

"Helen, I was so fortunate as to save Mr. Curtis and his sister, and so wretchedly unfortunate as to make the painful discovery that you were engaged to this gentleman, that you had broken with me."

"I met him on my way here, Helen, and I have come to ask if it is true?"

"Oh Claude! I did promise to be his wife, because my parents urged it, and I told him that I loved another."

"But, no, Claude, I love you, and I can never become the wife of any other man and I will not!" and she sprung into the open arms of her lover just as her horrified parents appeared upon the scene.

With a little oath Kent Curtis turned away and a few days after there were two families made poor, for it became known that the young spendthrift had swamped his father, by his fast life and was forced to fly to escape punishment for forgeries committed, which Mr. Marcy, no longer hoping to have his daughter wed a rich man, was also forced to go to the wall as a bankrupt.

But while Kent Curtis became a fugitive from justice, Claude Cassiday wedded Helen Marcy the one idol of his heart.

CHAPTER XV.

A MAN'S REVENGE.

ONE moonlight night, years after the day when Helen Marcy was put to the test to choose between her two lovers, a vessel was sailing slowly along among the Bahamas, north of the Island of San Domingo.

It was an armed craft and as trim looking as a vessel-of-war in hull, deck and rig, only her crew were apparently of a score of nationalities, and the flag flying above her decks, although it was night, was not a legitimate one among nations.

"Boat ho!" suddenly called the lookout aloft, and just a couple of points off the course of the schooner a boat was visible in the moonlight, tossing about upon the moonlit waters.

The call of the lookout brought from the cabin a man wearing the uniform of a United States naval officer of the rank of captain.

He swept the sea with his glass without asking any question of the officer in charge of the deck, or of the lookout, and his glance quickly fell upon the boat.

"It is a man-of-war's gig."

"Head for it, helmsman," he said and the schooner's bow was let fall off until she pointed for the boat.

The sea was not rough, yet the little boat danced about upon the waves at will, with no hand to guide it.

"Ho the boat!" sung out the captain of the schooner in a loud voice as the vessel neared it.

But no response came and the order was given the helmsman to run to leeward, luff sharp and graze the boat, into which one of the crew was ordered to spring with a line.

The helmsman obeyed the order and the seaman was about to make his spring when suddenly a form arose above the gunwales and a childish voice called out:

"Ah! I've found the schooner at last!"

"Secure the boat, and be careful not to harm the boy!" called out the schooner's captain.

The seaman made the spring, the boat was hauled alongside and a moment after a lad of seemingly ten years came aft and was taken into the cabin whither the captain had gone.

His face was a most attractive one, fearless, intelligent and bronzed by exposure, though it was baggared now as from suffering.

He was dressed in a sailor suit, wore his tarpaulin jauntily and gazed about him with seeming wonder at his surroundings and deep interest.

He met the look of the captain fearlessly after saluting him with politeness.

"Well, my lad, how is it I pick you up at sea in an open boat and in these waters?" said the captain not unkindly, while he felt a strange interest in the little waif and a belief that he had somewhere seen him before.

"My father's vessel was becalmed, sir, and I went ashore at an island to gather shells, when my boat was caught in a sea current and borne far away," and the boy's voice quivered a little.

"When was this, my lad?"

"Day before yesterday, sir."

"And you have been drifting for forty-eight hours?"

"Yes, sir."

"And must be very hungry?"

"I am, sir, very, ah! so very hungry."

The captain called to his steward to bring more supper at once for the lad, and then said:

"You say it was your father's vessel?"

"Yes, sir."

"What kind of a vessel?"

"A schooner, sir."

"Not a cruiser?"

"No sir, a trader."

"Ah! well, it is lucky we picked you up, for a terrible storm is coming on, and that means a great deal in this latitude."

"But what is the name of your father?"

"Claude Cassiday, sir, and it's my name too, sir—ah!"

The exclamation was caused by the sudden cry of the captain and his spring from his seat as though the boy had shot at him.

"Are you ill, sir?" he asked as every particle of color left the face of the man.

"No, boy, no! I must give orders on deck though, for do you not hear the wailing of that storm?"

"Wait here," and the captain hastily went on deck, unmindful of the fact that he wore no hat.

Soon he returned and found the lad just finishing the supper which the steward had brought him, and he said in his frank way:

"Oh, sir, I was so hungry I could not wait, and I thank you, sir, so much, and the steward too."

The captain was still pale, but calm now, and he motioned the steward to take the tray away, and then as he resumed his seat asked:

"What did you say your name was, my lad?"

"Claude Cassiday, sir."

"And your father's name?"

"I was named after him, sir."

"I suppose you are from New England?"

"From Boston, sir."

"And your mother is living?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you have brothers and sisters?"

"I have no brother, sir, only a sister."

"And what is her name?"

"Helen, sir."

"Ah! named after your mother, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was your mother before she was married?"

"Miss Helen Marcy, sir."

"I see, and you are about ten or eleven years old?"

"Ten, sir, in a short while."

"Well, you are a bright boy indeed, Master Claude Cassiday, and I am very glad to have met you, so very glad, my boy, and you shall be my *protege*."

"When can I go back home, sir, or to join my father, please, sir?"

"Well, this vessel is a cruiser, and it will be a long while before we put into any port; but one of these days I will take you home."

"In the mean time you shall share my cabin with me, and I'll make you a midshipman, for I suppose you are something of a sailor?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I know a great deal that my father and the men have taught me, and I would like to be a middy ever so much, on a vessel-of-war."

"Yes, this is a vessel-of-war, and you will soon come to like the life on board of her, my lad, for I intend to have it so."

"Now the steward will show you your bunk, and you had better retire, for you have had a hard time of it."

"But if the storm breaks, sir, I can come on deck, please?"

"Yes, but you must not be reckless, for I intend to be very careful of you, as careful as your mother and father could be," and Captain Kent the buccaneer went on deck muttering to himself:

"Her son and his! Now I will have my revenge, for I shall make their boy a pirate!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE YOUNG BUCCANEER.

AS Kent the Buccaneer, had said to young Claude Cassiday, his was a vessel-of-war; but it was a war to the knife under the black flag for gold alone.

In the years which had passed since Helen Marcy had been put to the test of a decision between the true man and the false, and she had

so wisely chosen, Kent Curtis had drifted about the world a fugitive from justice.

His forgeries had made him an outlaw, and he had gone from bad to worse until he had become a lawless rover of the seas.

Talents and courage which, if exerted in a good cause would have made him a name of honor, had been exerted to add to his greed for gold and in a life of crime until at last he had become the ally of buccaneers, then their lieutenant and at last by a bold stroke their chief.

As Kent the Buccaneer he was known, and also as "Captain Kent."

The one weak spot in his nature was his past love for Helen Marcy.

He had loved her devotedly, but supposing her father to be a man of large wealth he had hoped to marry her and thus save himself from disgrace and his father from ruin.

His sister Kate he had also deeply loved, and it had been a bitter blow to him when he felt he must drag her down with him, as the sister of a criminal.

Claude Cassiday had saved his life, and Kate's, but when he found that he was the preferred lover of Helen Marcy, he hated him, and more, he hated the one he loved because she had chosen other than himself.

So it was that a venomous joy filled his heart when a strange and seemingly fatal destiny placed in his way the son of Helen Marcy and Claude Cassiday.

"I will have my revenge, for I shall make their son a pirate and then see them suffer," was the burden of his song.

It was months before the pirate schooner sought her rendezvous, after the picking up at sea of Claude Cassiday.

The boy was treated well, messed with the captain, became a favorite with all the crew and yet he was not long in finding out that the schooner was not a legitimate cruiser.

When on voyages with his father he had heard much of pirates and recalled a number of exciting flights from them, so that he knew they were to be dreaded, still he was too young to take his unfortunate situation greatly to heart, and he accepted all as it came to him, but with the firm determination in his own mind to escape when opportunity offered.

He realized that the chief did not intend to let him go away from him, but this knowledge he kept to himself, for he was wise beyond his years.

Still, boy that he was, the wild sea life held a charm for him which he really enjoyed, and only at night, when in his little bunk, did memories of his father, mother, and little sister Helen come to him, and he felt how greatly they must sorrow for his unknown fate.

Captain Kent was a very able commander, shrewd and clever, and knowing how persistently his retreat was hunted, he arranged a place for a rendezvous that was a very safe one.

He was wont to sail away from a retreat, with orders to his Island Captain, to meet him at a certain point within a given time.

He left only a sloop capable of bearing his people on a short cruise, in pleasant weather, so that there would be no temptation to run away, and also turn rover in the one he left in command.

On certain occasions, while refitting his vessel, he would load the sloop with his booty, and run it secretly into some island port, where he could dispose of it for cash.

Havana, Kingston, Nassau and other ports were thus visited, and he had agents in all of them.

The desire of Kent seemed to be to gain vast riches, and he would keep his personal treasure hidden where not a soul of his crew knew where it could be found, and he was accumulating a fortune for his future pleasure, for the greed for gold alone lured him into piracy.

When his vessel at last turned its prow toward the island rendezvous, little Claude was glad at the prospect of a run ashore, much as he loved the sea.

He took delight in roaming over the hills and valleys, and talking to the strange, lawless people who composed the buccaneer settlement.

He kept his eyes and ears open to all that went on about him, ashore and afloat, and he was anxious to learn all that he could of the people and their reckless existence.

He sought to, to become an expert in all pertaining to a vessel and the duties of one on board, from ordinary seaman to that of commander, for so many orders did Claude carry from the chief the men were wont to call him the "Little Captain."

Over two years had passed away, and yet no opportunity had come to Claude to leave the schooner or the band.

Captain Kent was enriching himself, and yet constantly longed for more.

The boy still held a longing to get away, and yet no opportunity offered which he dared venture upon.

He was growing into a manly lad, his nature somewhat warped by his surroundings, and yet the memory of his mother was still holding an

influence over him for good, and keeping him from deeds that he was not forced to commit.

He had been in many a chase, many a hard-fought combat, and came to understand that he and all lived with a noose about their necks.

He had come to know the Southern waters fairly well, and the Bahamas also, and was the pride of the buccaneer band.

Captain Kent seemed to have grown really fond of him, and he was also drawn toward the stern, dark-faced, handsome man who held aloof from all others save the lad, and who seemed not to possess a friend in the wide world.

Now and then when he wished the lad would be left at the retreat, and it was upon such an occasion that the schooner of Lieutenant Harold Hartwell was captured by the buccaneer, and the opportunity appeared for Pinto, as the outlaws called the boy, to aid the escape of the captives, and the result of which is already known to the reader.

CHAPTER XVII.

A GERM OF MUTINY.

THE treacherous naval officer, who had been tempted to break his pledge to his dying comrade, Claude Cassiday, and agree with his ambitious and avaricious wife to take the treasure on the Bahama Island all for himself, was not a man to do things by halves.

He had cast the die on the side of wrong, and he was determined to carry the affair through to the end.

His wife's jewels had been found, a small but fleet and stanch schooner had been secured, and a crew selected, as has been seen.

Then followed the cruise and search for the treasure island, where Lieutenant Cassiday had told him he had buried a large treasure, and which he would leave as a legacy to him and to his wife and child, for the dying officer was not sure that his little son still lived.

The capture of the schooner by the Island Buccaneers, and their escape through the daring of little Claude, whom they deserted, is known, so I will now follow the sloop after her leaving the little basin the night of their sailing from the island.

"I say, mates, it's a shame to desert that brave boy," said the man who had urged against Captain Harold's doing so.

The captain held the tiller now, as the sloop was being urged seaward by the large oars, or rather sweeps.

"I say the same, mate, and my idea is to go back and wait for the boy," said another of the crew.

"Yes, it's but the square thing to do," a third remarked.

"I say as the boy took big chances, we go back and wait for him a reasonable time."

It was the fourth man who said this, and as by one accord the men stopped rowing, for two were at either sweep.

"What is it?" sternly asked Captain Harold, for I will call him by the name he had assumed for the secret voyage.

"Captain, we have decided that it's a cruel thing to leave that plucky boy, and we'll go back and wait for him a reasonable time at least," said the spokesman of the four seamen.

"And I command you to give way at those sweeps!" was the stern rejoinder of the captain.

But the sweeps still dragged in the water and the spokesman again had something to say:

"See here, captain, if the schooner is aground, and the boy is one to keep his word, we have every advantage even if our going is known now, and if we wait for the lad half an hour only, it will help ease our conscience, so I say go back and wait."

"So say I."

"And me to."

"Yes, go back, captain."

There were four against one, and the men seemed to consider the matter settled, for they began to pull on the starboard sweep and back on the port to go about.

But Captain Harold had made up his mind to his course, and he determined to carry it out.

He alone knew that there was a treasure upon the sloop.

He had not made that fact known to the men, reading just so much of what the boy had written him regarding their escape as suited him, and telling them no more.

What the amount of the treasure was he could only guess, and if the boy did not come along, then he alone knew the secret.

Should there be a mistake about the treasure of Claude Cassiday, then he would have the one on the sloop.

If he got both, so much the better.

When the boy had helped them out of the cabin he had given to Captain Harold his belt with two pistols and a cutlass.

The men had not been so favored, nor had they noticed the act.

Now their captain meant to hold the power in his own hands and he said sternly:

"Men, you shipped with me to obey my will and go upon a special cruise.

"You were to get big pay and obey me implicitly.

"The schooner is lost and I am the sufferer, and I do not intend that your desire to help a pirate boy shall stand in the way of my success.

"The boy will easily avoid suspicion being cast upon him, and if we go back we will more than likely be recaptured and put to death, so give way with the sweeps and we will soon be where we can set sail."

"No, captain, we won't desert the lad without an effort to save him by a short wait," said the man who had before spoken.

"I command you to give way.

"Will you refuse?"

"Yes, captain, until we see that there is no chance to save the lad."

"Hold! pull another back stroke on that port oar and I'll kill the man who does it!"

There was no mistaking this stern threat.

The right hand of the captain had left the tiller and was pointed toward them and it held something that even in the darkness looked very like a pistol.

"Captain, are you armed?"

"I am, and I mean what I say—I will kill the man who disobeys me.

"Give way!"

He rose now, and exchanging his pistol to his left hand he raised his cutlass in his right.

The men were awed, for they were wholly unarmed, and besides they did not wish it to come to a combat with their commander.

They were seamen, but not navigators, and they wished to at least have some one who could run the sloop back to port.

Then they had no desire to throw away the voyage as it were, and they had seen enough of Captain Harold to know that he would keep his word and kill them.

Their comrades had fallen, they were just then escaping for their lives, and so they yielded, their spokesman speaking for all, when he said:

"Captain, if we expect to get back in safety we must cling together.

"We want to save the boy, but we do not wish to sacrifice our own lives.

"You are armed and we are at your mercy, so we yield—eh, lads?"

A general assent was the response, and the sweeps were resumed once more, and the sloop moved on out to sea for half a mile further, when the sails were set, and still keeping the helm Captain Harold laid the course he desired to hold to escape the schooner should she come in chase.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOR GREED OF GOLD.

THE few men on the sloop accepted the situation, but not in the best of moods.

They felt a contempt for their captain where before they had held high respect.

But when he deliberately deserted their rescuer, they decided against him unanimously.

The sails were set upon the little sloop, mainsail, topsail, jib and flying jib, and under the impulse of a six-knot breeze which the island had kept them from feeling before, the little craft went bowling along at a merry pace.

Captain Harold soon discovered that he had a very fleet, stanch craft, and that it would take a fast vessel to overhaul him in quiet waters with the start he had.

He headed so as to lead to the belief when dawn came and he would be seen from the island, that he was trying to reach the nearest port for safety, and to report the presence of the buccaneers.

But the very moment the man he had sent aloft called out that the island was out of sight, he changed his course and headed for the island where the treasure was hidden, and which he had sinned and risked so much to get possession of.

He saw the ill-humor of the crew, yet appeared not to notice it, and said:

"Now, lads, one of you get breakfast, and we will hold on all day and reach the island, or its vicinity to-night, and I'll give you the share of the whole crew to divide among you, so be lively men and we'll soon get out of these dangerous waters.

This generous offer made the men a little more willing and quick in their movements, and the breakfast was soon ready.

The captain ate his alone and then took his trick at the tiller while the crew ate, after which he left, divided them into watches and turned in for what rest he could get, he said.

He was tired of course, but not too much fatigued to at once seek in the little cabin for the treasure which the lad had told him was on board.

He was not long in finding it, and his eyes brightened as he saw that he had a very fair fortune on the sloop, even should he not find the island treasure of Claude Cassiday.

There was a varied assortment of valuables, with several bags of silver and some gold and it was snugly hidden away in a trap in the flooring.

With a glad heart at his discovery, Captain Harold threw himself down to rest, and it was noon before he awoke and went on deck.

The sloop was bending gracefully to a stiff

breeze, and fairly flying along, while not a sail was in sight to show pursuit.

Here and there an island was visible, and far ahead a larger one than the others seen about them.

Just at sunset the sloop came within short distance of the large island, and the anchor was let go, as Captain Harold would not attempt to run in for anchorage by night.

But bright and early the sloop was headed for a haven marked on Claude Cassiday's chart as being a good anchorage.

The surroundings all coincided with the chart and Captain Harold knew that the island had been found.

But as the sloop was heading in toward the little haven Captain Harold suddenly glanced astern and his face turned deadly pale.

There, yet far away upon the horizon, he beheld a sail.

In spite of its being yet two leagues distant he knew the vessel as the one he had chartered for his gold-seeking cruise.

To his eyes the situation presented itself as it really was, for the one in command of the schooner had not been led astray by the course the sloop had taken.

Knowing that the fugitives had come to the Bahamas for a treasure, and not aware that they had been told by the lad that there was one upon the sloop, they felt sure that they would run in to where they were heading when captured.

As they had been seen to come in a certain direction it was pretty certain that they would hold on the same course the following morning.

So the buccaneers, though thirty hours behind in starting, yet went in the course of the island chain and were thus enabled to gain upon the sloop the whole zig-zag course it had made to throw them off the scent.

With a twelve-knot breeze blowing through the night, and the treasure-hunting schooner being a very fleet sailer, they had logged thirty leagues when sighted by Captain Harold.

Hoping that he was not yet seen by those on the schooner, and could run around the island unseen, Captain Harold at once showed his crew their danger and ordered them to get ready to run for it.

They were by no means backward in their desire to do this, and the sloop was soon cutting the waters at a great speed as she flew along in flight.

It took but a short while to show the fugitives that they had not yet been sighted; but as they shot out from the shelter of the land they discovered the schooner at once changing her course.

Wishing to avoid attracting attention to the island, Captain Harold held on as though he had not sighted the schooner, until he had gained a point when he caught the breeze in full force.

Then he yawed the sloop mildly, sent up the topsail and headed her on a course to get the best sailing out of her possible, as though he had just discovered his pursuer while sailing past the island.

The sails were wet from the decks, and a driver was set with the aid of an outrigger, while a kite jib was run up.

Until this was done the schooner had been gaining considerably, but she was now held off on even terms it looked.

Captain Harold knew now that had but one course to pursue and that was to get out of that dangerous latitude as quickly as possible.

He knew that the schooner would keep close after him, and if she lost him, they would sail among the islands still on the search.

So he made up his mind to at once leave the Bahamas, head for the Florida Coast and thence along it northward until he reached the port he sought.

He also made up his mind that his crew should not share one dollar of the treasure on board the sloop, and that he would get an extended leave and in another vessel come back after the hidden legacy of Claude Cassiday.

CHAPTER XIX.

SILENCED.

THE sloop held her own during the long day's chase, or so nearly so that when night came on the schooner was yet a league astern.

But the buccaneers still kept up the pursuit, using every effort to overhaul the fleet sloop.

When night came Captain Harold had hoped to elude the schooner; but with the going down of the sun the full moon rose out of the sea and the glance of his sails could be seen with a glass he well knew, if not with the naked eye.

He kept on steadily now, shaping his course to run northward of the Bahamas, and straight for the Florida Coast, while he hoped to fall in with some vessel that would frighten his pursuer off his wake.

The morning dawned to find the schooner a mile nearer, and if she had been armed, Captain Harold knew that she was within range.

But in their haste to go in chase of the sloop, the buccaneers had not put a gun aboard the schooner, and now regretted not having done so.

During the day the chase was kept up as

before, and when the sun set the buccaneers were less than a mile from their prey.

But as they began to feel the hope that before dawn they would overhaul the sloop, dark clouds swept up from the westward, and the moon became overcast.

The buccaneers began to pray lustily for a calm, or clear weather, while Captain Harold and his men sent up prayers for a blow.

They were not anxious to encounter one of the hurricanes so dreaded in that latitude, but they were hoping for dark storm-clouds and a storm sufficiently severe to obscure the moonlight wholly, and enable them to elude the buccaneers in the darkness.

Soon after nightfall the storm swept down upon the sea, and a shout broke from the lips of Captain Harold as he lost sight of the schooner for the first time in many hours.

The sloop was at once stripped of all sail, except enough to handle her with ease, and she was put away before the gale.

For hours the storm lasted, the sea ran high, and the sloop drove along at a mad speed.

Then the moonlight broke through the clouds, the sea was illumined, and a cry arose that there was no schooner in sight.

But another cry was also heard, for it was found that one of the crew had mysteriously disappeared.

No one had heard his cry of despair, no one had seen him washed off by the sea, but certain it was that one of the men had gone.

A sadness fell upon the others, and Captain Harold seemed deeply moved over the sad fate of the poor sailor who had served him so well.

But repining brought him not back again, and the sloop's course was changed again as she was put upon her course for the Coast of Florida, and all eyes watched the seas for some sight of the schooner.

The morning dawned at last, but no sail was in sight, and the face of Captain Harold brightened as he felt that he had thrown the buccaneers off his track.

The wind was fresh and fair, and the sloop sped gayly along on her run, though the seamen brooded over the loss of their comrade.

Captain Harold bade them get what rest they could, leaving one man on duty with him, and said that he would take the night watches at the helm, sleeping by day after laying their course for them to steer.

So passed two days more and while the wind was blowing fresh one night, the captain at the helm with one man on deck, the other two were aroused by the loud and startling cry:

"Man overboard!"

The two men rushed upon deck to find the night very dark, for the moon had not risen, and a very high sea running.

The skies were overcast, and Captain Harold held the helm, while the sloop was tearing along at a terrific pace, carrying more sail than was safe.

"My God, lads, Denning is gone, poor fellow!"

"Quick, shorten sail so we can go about and look for him," said Captain Harold.

The men promptly obeyed, the mainsail being reefed down and the jib also, when the sloop was easily handled.

The two seamen then went aft to know how their comrade had been lost, as the sloop was put back over her course to see if the poor fellow could be found.

"The squall came down upon us most suddenly, men, just as we rushed into a very heavy sea, and Denning went forward to call you, when I heard him cry and saw him borne astern upon a huge wave."

The two men placed themselves forward on either side and began to keep a close watch for their lost comrade, while Captain Harold's voice rose again and again in a loud ringing hail.

But thus the hour passed away, and the sloop was put once more on her course, for all hope of finding the unfortunate sailor was given up.

"One of you will have to be constantly on deck with me, men, after this," said the captain.

Whether they suspected him or not, it was certain that the two men remained close together for the next few days, while Captain Harold could find no excuse for being alone with either one of them.

Then, as he was pretending to sleep one day, he heard one say:

"When we sight the coast, mate, we will be all right, and it will be *our turn*!"

This made Captain Harold suspicious, and so he held well off the coast, though heading in a northerly direction.

"It will be *my turn* again," he muttered, "when I reach near enough to stand the rest of the run home alone."

These were significant words, and their import will be better understood when the next chapter has been perused.

CHAPTER XX.

A SECOND VENTURE.

THE home of Lieutenant Harold Hartwell was upon the shores of the bay in the environs of the city of B—.

He owned the home, and Mrs. Hartwell had beautified it in many ways within and without

doors, for she was ambitious to be considered rich, and to have a pleasant home to invite her wealthy and aristocratic visitors to.

Mrs. Hartwell had said to her friends that her husband had gone away for his health, his wound giving him trouble, and seeing no reason to question the truth of the statement, no one had done so.

Her little daughter also believed the same thing, as did the servants.

But all noticed that the handsome wife of the naval officer began to grow anxious from some reason as Lieutenant Hartwell did not return, and that officer's health was repeatedly asked after, people fearing he was getting worse.

One pleasant afternoon Mrs. Hartwell was pacing up and down the piazza, her face wearing a troubled look, when her eyes fell upon a little sloop heading into the bay and holding on a course that would bring her to an anchorage off the mansion, unless she was keeping close in to get the advantage of a long tack, for the wind was from a quarter that compelled her to beat in.

Something about the sloop attracted more than ordinary attention from the handsome woman.

It was a weather-beaten craft, showing signs of hard knocks by the sea, and she carried reefed sails though the wind was not very strong.

Then too there was but one person visible upon her decks, and he sat in the cockpit, his hand upon the tiller.

As the craft drew nearer Mrs. Hartwell grew more and more interested in it, though just why she was not able to explain herself.

She went to the hallway and brought out a glass, which she adjusted and turned upon the little sloop, now not half a mile distant.

It was just sunset and the last glow fell upon the face of the man at the helm, so that he was revealed distinctly.

Hardly had she leveled the glass when she gave a startled cry, her face turned very white and she seemed for a moment very unsteady upon her feet.

Again however she leveled the glass, and then from her lips came the words:

"Yes, there is no mistake now—it is *my husband*!"

She sat down, as though from weakness, her eyes still riveted upon the man in the stern of the sloop.

At last she said in a low tone:

"I dare not make known his coming, for he appears to come alone."

"What does it mean?"

"Has he gotten the treasure, or has misfortune befallen him?"

"He certainly would not have gone in that craft to the Bahamas, and surely he would not bring his crew *here*."

"But where is his crew?"

She could not settle the question, so she clasped her hands nervously together and waited.

She saw the sloop run in close to the shore in the gathering gloom, luff and drop her anchor.

The man at the helm had run forward to let fly the jib, and let fall the anchor, so this seemed like conclusive proof that but one person was on board the sloop.

Then the mainsail came down with a run, and she could see and hear no more as the shadows deepened and shut out the harbor from her view.

It seemed hours that she waited, and yet it was only minutes.

In her nervousness she arose and went out to the gate.

Soon she saw a form approaching and he came straight toward the gate.

"Hartwell!" she called.

"Is that you, Celia?"

"Yes," and she sprung toward him asking quickly:

"The treasure! have you got it?"

"I have a treasure, yes."

"Heaven bless you, my noble husband," and then she greeted him with the warmest affection.

"But how is it that you come alone in a small vessel?"

"It is a long story, Celia, and first I have much to do, for there is something to be taken from the sloop, which I will then set adrift to let whoever may wish to, claim her, for I desire to get rid of the craft."

"But can she not be sold for a fair price?"

"Yes, but I will not take the risk, so do not urge it."

"To-night I will bring the treasure ashore, and then I will depart and return by coach to-morrow."

Such was the plan, and that night Mrs. Hartwell was wild with joy, for hidden away in her bosom was a fortune, to her, in jewelry, gems, laces, silks and other valuables.

The next evening the coach brought Lieutenant Hartwell home, and before he closed his eyes his wife had from his lips his story.

He made no secret of the fact that he had added to the sin of treachery to Claude Cassiday by deserting the lad Pinto, who had aided him to escape, and with the same strange calmness he told how first one and then another of the

four seamen of the sloop had gone overboard to their death, aided by a blow from him.

"The secret had to be buried, Celia, and so when near enough to port to run in alone I prepared to get rid of the remaining two.

"They were suspicious of me and planned my death, feeling convinced that the sloop had treasure on board.

"But I was armed and had them at a disadvantage, and here I am with my secret and my treasure."

"Yes, and how much is this treasure worth, Hartwell?"

"Fully fifty thousand."

"So little?"

"Well, we have yet the other one."

"True, and you must ask for an extended leave, Hartwell, and go again.

"We have made the venture and the sin will be no greater to get the other, and with it we can live in the luxury I have so long dreamed of.

"When will you go?" said his wife in a business-like manner.

"The sooner the better, I suppose."

"Certainly."

"Then I shall apply for a continued leave."

"And the vessel you lost?"

"Will never be heard of again, and the owners must lose her, for I went under an assumed name, no one knowing me."

"Do the same again, but lose no time, for the treasure must be ours now, Hartwell, cost what it may."

And just two weeks after, Harold Hartwell left on his second search of the legacy of Claude Cassiday.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BOY FUGITIVE.

It is now time to return to the brave little lad whom the buccaneers called Pinto, after the remarkable rescue by Miguel Santo.

It will be remembered that the man who was looked upon as the cruellest and wickedest man in the buccaneer band, had shown the same ugly spirit toward the lad, even as after his act of self-sacrifice which made known that Santo was innocent of the rescue of the prisoners.

But Miguel Santo had acted for a purpose, which was to save the boy without attracting the slightest suspicion upon himself.

The cruel wretch after all had a soft spot in his heart, and so it was he had plotted to save the boy who had saved his life at the risk of his own.

He had done all in his power to aid the boy after his escape, for he had selected his own stanch surf-skiff, a whale-boat, which was well decked over, carried a mainsail and jib, and could stand very rough seas and a hard blow.

He had furnished it well, put in a musket and pistols as well as fishing lines and ammunition, while he had set a small compass in a battle lantern in the deck before where the young helmsman had sat.

Added to this he tied to the end of the tiller a bag of money, so that the boy would not be penniless when he reached a port.

When it was dark he had carried the boat around to the secret basin and then, as has been seen, rescued the boy in a way that would lead to the belief that he had slipped the irons over his small hands and feet, bent the grating in the window so as to pass through and had stolen the whale-boat in which to put to sea.

As there was a fair wind blowing, and nothing but small boats in which to pursue, Miguel Santo held no fear of the youth being overtaken, and he only hoped he could escape the dangers of the sea as well and reach some port in safety.

He was well aware that the boy could handle a boat as well as he could, and was a bold and fearless sailor, so he hoped for the best.

At any rate he had done his duty in setting him free, and would thus keep his conscience clear.

Under such auspices it was that Pinto made his escape from the buccaneer island.

He went to work after dropping the island astern with the air of one who knew what was before him and just how to master it.

The boat was headed on a course which would keep the islands near and bring him out in the line of vessels near the Great Abaco.

This was his purpose, and he meant to stick to it at all hazards.

His first rest was on an island after he had dropped the buccaneer retreat out of sight.

He ran in until he came to a harbor, and then anchoring had his first breakfast, and sought rest, which he needed.

It was late in the afternoon when he awoke, and his first act was to look around the horizon for a sail.

Not one was in sight.

Then he had his dinner and supper all in one, set sail and lighting his lantern, set out upon a course according to his knowledge of the island waters.

Until late into the night he held on, and then dropped anchor, made all shipshape and turned in until dawn.

Again he resumed his flight, and thus kept on, resting here and there on the islands, and being

very careful not to make a long run between them when there was ugly weather brewing.

Reaching a pleasant stopping-place one afternoon in the face of a coming storm, he found a safe anchorage, made all shipshape, and awaited the breaking of the hurricane.

It came with terrific force, and Pinto congratulated himself as he sat in his little boat through the long hours of the night that he had not been caught away from a harborage.

The hurricane lasted for days, and Pinto never left his haven of refuge, for he was wise beyond his years.

At last the storm blew itself out, the sea ran down, and the boy began the same course of easy runs from island to island.

His larder held well, for he was not extravagant with his food, and the casks were refilled with fresh water at the islands.

He fished often too for food, and managed to get some game on the larger islands and this helped amazingly.

Thus weeks passed away and he knew that he was nearing the vicinity where he was likely to be sighted by passing vessels.

One night he came to an island, which had been visited before, and a sad remembrance was there in the graves before him.

He read the names of the dead, cut into an oar-blade, and also painted upon the rocks.

How little he dreamed that his father had been upon that very island, the sole survivor of the cutter's crew who had left the vessel-of-war in searching for the haunts of buccaneers.

Then he read what was painted upon the rocks, which was as follows, after giving the names of the dead:

"The crew of a cutter sent out from the United States sloop-of-war Emerald, under command of Lieutenant Claude Cassiday, who was the sole survivor when his boat was wrecked here upon this island, and alone performed the last sad rites for his unfortunate shipmates."

"Lieutenant Claude Cassiday?"

"My father's name, and a lieutenant in the United States Navy? How strange!" cried the boy fugitive, as he stood regarding the lettering on the rock near the graves of the cutter's crew.

For a long while he regarded the graves and the name of his father, his own name, recalled vividly the past to him, his happy home and parents and his little sister Helen.

He could not understand how it was that his father was a lieutenant on board of a United States sloop-of-war, if it was his father.

It was several days before little Claude could prevail upon himself to leave the island, so thoroughly did his father's name upon the rocks hold him there with a fascination he found it hard to resist.

He seemed even to take comfort in being near the graves of those who had been his father's comrades.

But, at last, he resumed his way once more, running out through the break in the reef by which he had entered, and holding on as before toward the point where he hoped to find aid.

At last he was compelled to leave the last island, with no other in sight or ahead.

He must make a bold venture, and he entered upon it fearlessly.

All through the night he sailed and when the morning dawned he was upon the wide expanse of sea, with no land, no sail in sight!

CHAPTER XXII.

PICKED UP.

It had been over six weeks since Pinto, as I will still call him, had left the island of the buccaneers.

His provisions had run low, and but for the game he had shot on the islands, and his daily fishing, would have been all gone.

Several days of scanty food only remained to him, and the rough usage his little craft had received had strained it into leaking, so that he had to work hard at bailing it out every few hours.

Still the daring young adventurer had boldly faced the sea and its terrors in his last run for safety.

He had determined to run across the course for vessels, making, if he failed to find any, for the Florida Coast.

He hoped to make the run and miss a blow, as he started purposely just after a severe storm.

The first night out he dropped all land out of sight, and yet he did not lose his splendid pluck when the dawn revealed a vast sea around him, with not even a sea-bird in sight.

Toward the afternoon the heavens began to look threatening, and the boy's experience, young as he was, told him that he was going to have a blow.

The more he observed the clouds the more he became convinced that there was a terrible storm before him.

So he lay to and began to get his boat as shipshape as possible to meet the tempest.

He did all he could to meet the event, then bailed the boat out dry, and under merely a jib, went on his way, while the skies darkened over him and the wind increased each minute.

But, while he had been thus engaged, a sail

had come in sight, and it was upon the course taken by the lad.

The craft was a schooner of sixty tons, and she bowed along under reefed mainsail and jib, all ready for the fury with the elements.

She was a trim-built craft, having the appearance of having been built for speed rather than usefulness, and upon her decks were only a dozen men.

Pacing the deck and watching the gathering storm was a man in sailor attire, and evidently her commander.

The lookout had hailed the deck with the report that a sail was in sight, and after some time, as the schooner went driving along rapidly, the small boat of the boy adventurer had been made out from the decks.

The course of the schooner had been changed from a northerly course to a westerly one, when the gale began to blow, for to hold on as she was would have taken her into a dangerous cruising-ground for a vessel in bad weather, and by night, for she would have been dangerously near the coral islands of the Bahamas.

So she had run off before the gale, expecting when the tempest came in all its fury to be driven still further away from her course.

The discovery of the whale-boat under sail was a surprise to every one in the schooner.

The craft was pitching along in a very rough sea, her jib alone dragging a great deal of speed out of her in the stiff gale then blowing.

It could be seen that but one person was visible in the boat and what could bring him there so far from a haven in a craft seemingly so frail was what puzzled the crew of the schooner.

The clouds darkened still more, the wind blew stronger and stronger and the sea ran higher and higher, while the two craft drove on.

It was evident that the helmsman of the little boat did not know of the schooner astern of him, or if so was indifferent to her presence, for he held on unswervingly on his course and kept his staggering boat well in hand.

At last he turned suddenly as though conscious instinctively of human presence near, and beheld the schooner now a quarter of a mile away.

He took a hasty view of the vessel and then held on as before, seeing that the schooner would soon overhaul him and knowing the danger of attempting to wear around in the heavy sea then following him.

Soon after came a hail from the schooner.

"Boat ahoy!"

"Ahoy the schooner," came in a clear boyish voice.

"Where from and whither bound?"

"I'd like to be picked up just now, sir, in the face of the hurricane," came back the response.

"Ahoy, my brave lad, we'll run by and lay to, and then come up under our lee."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Are you alone?"

"All alone, sir."

Then the schooner swept by and every eye was riveted upon the brave young mariner.

"What about his boat, sir?" asked the mate of the captain.

But the latter had gone into his cabin.

The schooner swept on, and then lay to, and the whale-boat was run up under her, and a rope thrown was skillfully caught by the lad.

"What have you on board, my lad, that is valuable?"

"Only myself, sir, for my boat is almost a wreck," and Pinto swung himself up to the deck of the schooner, leaving his little craft to the mercy of the waves.

"The captain has sent word he wishes to see you in the cabin, my lad, for he is as anxious as we all are to know how so young a sailor comes to be abroad at sea," said the mate, as he grasped the hand of the boy.

"I am a fugitive, sir, from a buccaneers' retreat; but I will go and see the captain," and Pinto walked aft with the mate, and was soon ushered into the cabin of the schooner which had so timely come along to take him from his perilous situation, and not any too soon, for the hurricane was upon them now, and the lad saw his little craft driven furiously before it, as he stepped down into the cabin, while the mate looked to the care of his vessel, which bravely met the shock.

CHAPTER XXIII.

STRANGELY MET.

"CAPTAIN HAROLD!" broke from the lips of Pinto, as he went flying into the cabin of the schooner, in a very undignified manner, hurled forward by the leap of the vessel when struck by the hurricane.

"My God! you are Pinto!" the captain cried, and realizing that the storm was far more severe than he had anticipated, he sprang upon deck to see to the safety of his vessel.

Pinto had at once followed him, and the scene was an appalling one now.

The sea was white as snow with foam, the air was full of driving spray, and above all was as black as ink as heavy clouds drove along, almost sweeping the crests of the waves.

The schooner had been stripped of sails, and was driving along like a mad sea-monster, while just ahead was visible the whale-boat fairly

dragged from the top of one wave to another by the little jib which still held firmly.

"Port! port your helm!" yelled the mate in alarm.

"Hard! hard aport! if we strike her she will knock a hole in our bows!" shouted Captain Harold.

The two men at the wheel obeyed promptly, but in that mad sea the schooner did not promptly mind her helm, and the next instant there came a crashing of timbers and the sharp bows of the vessel cut down the little craft and swept over her.

"Sound the pumps, carpenter!" came the order of Captain Harold, and all breathlessly awaited the report.

It seemed a long time before the carpenter reappeared, and all broke forth in cheers at his words:

"No damage done, sir!"

As the schooner had met the first blow of the hurricane so well, and danger was comparatively over, Captain Harold soon left the deck to his first officer and returned to his cabin, beckoning Pinto to follow him.

"My boy, I am more than happy to have in part returned the great service you rendered me, and to explain away now what seemed on my side a most cruel desertion of you," and Captain Harold warmly grasped the hands of the youth.

Pinto was surprised, and after its first flush he seemed pleased.

He had liked Captain Harold from the first, and to feel that he had been disappointed in him was a blow to him that he had not gotten over.

Now the words of the officers showed that there was a mistake, that he had not purposely left him to the mercy of the buccaneers after he had risked his life to save him and his fellow prisoners.

"I did think hard of you, sir, most hard, at your desertion of me," he said.

"It was not my fault, my brave boy, but my men were the guilty ones."

"They possessed themselves of the arms you gave me, and the moment you had gone, said they would not wait your return."

"I was covered by a pistol, and the sloop was lowered into the basin."

"Then they seized the oars and rowed away with all speed."

"Once out of danger, I supposed that I would be given command again, but they sailed the vessel themselves until one day it was discovered that the buccaneers were in chase in my own schooner."

"They were very eager then to give me the command again, and I managed to save the sloop from capture."

"We were picked up at sea soon after, and I, upon landing, returned to my home and fitted out this vessel with all dispatch to go again to the Bahamas on the mission which I had first started upon."

"I do not mind telling you, Pinto, that my mission is to find a treasure I buried there some years ago when my vessel was wrecked."

"I have a good craft here and picked men, but I do not care for them to know yet just what I go for, while I am more than glad to find in you so good an ally and friend, and you may be sure I will do all in my power for you, only keep our secret from the men and do not let them know we have ever met before."

"In this way you can the greater aid me, my boy."

"Now tell me how it is I find you at sea as I do?" and Captain Harold was almost affectionate in his manner to the lad.

Pinto at once felt most kindly toward the captain, whose story he had no reason to doubt, and he told him of all that had occurred after their escape from the island, and how nobly Miguel Santo had behaved toward him.

The captain listened with the deepest attention and said:

"You are a brave boy, Pinto, and will make your mark in the world, I am sure."

"But what a pity you were not able to get any valuables to bring with you?"

"I forgot to tell you, sir, that I did have some gold I had saved up as I got it, and some gems, while Santo gave me several hundred pesos in gold, or rather tied the bag of money to the tiller for me to find it there."

"He was kind indeed, but you deserved it."

"And you got what was in the sloop, did you not, sir?"

"There was nothing there, Pinto, that I could find."

"Under the cabin floor, sir!"

"Nothing, and as the sloop was leaking badly when we were picked up, we scuttled her so that she soon after sunk."

"Unless some of the buccaneers on the island stole the money, sir, there was considerable hidden away in the sloop," said Pinto firmly.

"I only wish I could have found it; but I have plenty, Pinto, and you shall never want for a dollar, as you are to be my adopted son in the future, only for the present keep our secret."

"I will do as you say, sir," was the confiding response of the lad, who could not read the black heart in the bosom of Harold Hartwell.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHICH WAS THE TRAITOR?

THE story of Pinto was made known to the crew of the schooner, to the effect that he had been the captive of buccaneers and had escaped in the whale-boat.

Nothing was said as to his having before met Captain Harold, and the crew suspected nothing of the kind.

The first mate was the owner of the schooner, and it had been chartered by the naval lieutenant to go on a special mission.

This mission the mate knew, and he had been told enough to cause him to believe that the one who chartered his craft was in the Government service, and was sent for a treasure from a wrecked vessel.

He had his own crew with him, his officers being his son and son-in-law.

Of course he took second place when Harold assumed command, and he was to be well paid for his services, having already received a bonus that was a liberal one.

Such was the situation of Harold Hartwell's second voyage to the Bahamas after the legacy of Lieutenant Claude Cassiday.

When the storm had blown itself out the schooner, which was as fleet as a bird and stanch as a frigate, was put away, as Harold said, in search of the island.

He had a motive in saying that he had to hunt for the island, and which motive will soon be made known.

The schooner held on her way until a large island appeared off her starboard bow.

It was a couple of miles in length and of good width, while the shores were higher than those of the other islands, bolder and more rugged.

Then there was plenty of vegetation here and there and Captain Hartwell told his mate that he believed it was the island he sought.

He had in his favor the fact that the one he really did seek was a similar one if still many leagues away.

A boat was lowered therefore, when the schooner dropped anchor, and Pinto was told by the captain to accompany him ashore.

As the lad went below, Captain Harold said to his first officer:

"I hardly believe that yonder island is the one; but that boy urges me to land there as he says the buccaneers told him when they cruised by it, that a large treasure was buried there."

"Now he urges my going so earnestly that I will not refuse, but I hope we will not find it a pirate haunt, as we are unprepared for fighting."

"Yes, Captain Harold, our strength is only in our speed," the mate replied, with an admiring glance at his beautiful vessel.

So the boat put off from the schooner, bearing Captain Harold, Pinto and four oarsmen.

A landing was made after some difficulty, and while the four oarsmen were left to saunter about near the boat, the captain and Pinto went on up into the island to reconnoiter.

After awhile Captain Harold suggested that they should rest, and then asked:

"How is it, Pinto, that you speak English perfectly when you are a Spanish boy?"

"I am not a Spanish boy, sir," was the answer.

"Indeed! I had supposed that you were."

"No, sir, I am an American."

"Ah! can that be possible?"

"Yes, sir, like you I was the captive of the buccaneers."

"How came you to be captured, Pinto?"

"My father was then a merchant captain, sir, trading among the West Indies, and I rowed ashore one day in the gig, when our vessel was becalmed, here in the Bahama waters."

"I got into a strong current and was borne away, for the island prevented my being seen, and night coming on I was utterly lost."

"Two days after I was picked up by Captain Kent, the Bahama Buccaneer, and he made a pirate of me, I suppose, for I cruised with him often, and sometimes was left at the island retreat."

"So your parents must believe you to be dead?"

"Yes, sir, and it will be a glad surprise for them to see me turn up again."

"It will indeed be, my brave boy; but it is strange your father never searched for you?"

"He doubtless did do so, sir, and only on my way from the island the other day, I came upon an island where there were a number of graves, the crew of the United States sloop-of-war Emerald, and my father's name was there as the officer in command, while there was painted upon the rocks the statement that he was the sole survivor of the party; but you look ill, sir, and I guess the hot sun is too much for you?"

"No, I recalled friends and remembered the death of a friend most dear to me, for I—"

He paused with the sentence unfinished, and Pinto said:

"Perhaps you knew my father, sir; his name was Claude Cassiday?"

Captain Harold had risen quickly and turned his back upon the boy.

"I thought I heard the sound of a distant gun, Pinto."

"Did you hear it?"

"No, sir, it was the surf striking upon the rocks, I guess."

"Perhaps so; but I will make my way to yonder hilltop and take a look around the sea, while you make a thorough search of the island, from this side beginning yonder and going around to the north."

"I will begin my circuit as soon as I come down from the rocks, and meet you upon the other side of the island."

"If you get your half done first, wait for me there, as I will for you, and then we can return to the boat."

"Yes, sir, but what am I to search for?"

"Any signals, marks on the rocks, or graves?"

"I will, sir," and Pinto walked off in the direction indicated by Captain Harold, who watched his going until he had disappeared, and then started off at a rapid pace for the boat.

The men saw him coming soon after at a run and sprung to their arms.

"Quick, men, shove off, for this is a pirates' nest," he cried excitedly.

"And the lad, sir?"

"That boy is a traitor, a young pirate, for he urged my coming here, and by accident I discovered his treachery."

"Row for your lives, men, for that boy pirate has betrayed us!" cried the captain of the Gold-Seeker as he waved to his schooner to give the alarm.

CHAPTER XXV.

A TRAITOR'S TRIUMPH.

THE first mate of the schooner was startled to see the boat coming back at the full speed at which the four oarsmen could drive it.

He called out to his son, the second mate, that something had gone wrong, and then turned his glass upon the boat.

"There is one missing from the boat," he said.

"Who is it?" asked the second mate.

"The boy."

"Ah! what can the matter be?"

"I do not know, but the captain is waving as though for us to get up anchor and raise sail."

"All hands ahoy to get under way!" cried the first mate.

The order was obeyed with alacrity by the crew, and as the boat came nearer a hail came across the waters.

"Schooner, ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"The island is a pirates' nest, so crowd on to fly for our lives!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" and as the boat ran alongside of the schooner the anchor was apeak and she began to move through the waters.

"Which way shall I steer, sir?"

"Straight away from the island, and set every stitch of canvas she will carry."

"Ay, ay, sir!" and the mate gave the necessary orders.

In a few minutes more the schooner was bowling along under full canvas, heading away from the island which Captain Harold had called a "pirates' nest."

"Where is the boy, sir, if I may make so bold?" said the mate, coming aft to where the captain stood, his face flushing and paling by turns, and his look one of intense anxiety.

"Mr. Rathburn, that boy is a born pirate."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, he is none other than a decoy of the Bahama Buccaneers."

"I do not understand how, Captain Harold."

"Well, to explain, he was picked up by us, after having been blown away from his island rendezvous."

"His story that he was an escaped prisoner from the Buccaneers of the Bahamas was all nonsense, and as he urged it, I concluded to land here and see if I was right in my surmise that it was the island I sought."

"I left the men at the boat, while he led the way in to the island in a way that excited my suspicion."

"After awhile he proposed that I should go over to the further beach, while he went in another direction, and I pretended to agree, but watched him."

"I saw him start in a run, as soon as he deemed himself out of my sight, and I climbed upon a hill where there was a thicket and watched him."

"It was not long before he was joined by half a dozen men, and they talked earnestly together, and I saw them leave the lad and hurry away."

"Then I discovered the topmasts of a schooner over in the basin beyond, and saw that boughs of trees were bound upon them to cause them to look like the thicket about them."

"I at once knew that the boy was a traitor, that the island was a pirates' retreat, and their schooner was getting ready to run around and capture our vessel."

"I ran with all speed to the boat and we have, thank Heaven, escaped them, as their vessel cannot get around the island for an hour or more, and it will be dark within that time, while we have at least two leagues the start."

"I congratulate you, Captain Harold, for we have indeed had a narrow escape, as the schooner of the pirates is surely armed, and would

have run around upon us before we suspected danger.

"It was a close call, sir," said the mate, turning his glass upon the island, now growing dim in the distance.

At last he said:

"See, sir! is not that some one upon that high point waving to us?"

The captain took the glass and turned it upon the distant island.

There, upon a high point was a form, and he was waving wildly toward the rapidly receding schooner.

He had his coat in one hand, cap in the other and waved them unceasingly.

The captain caught one glimpse of the form, and though he kept his glass upon the island, he would not gaze upon that solitary form.

He also turned his face as much as possible away from Mate Rathburn, as though he did not wish him to see its paleness.

"It is the boy, Captain Harold, and he is waving to us."

"I see him, sir, and if you wish to return for him do so, only the responsibility is not mine," was the sharp reply.

"My dear sir, I have no desire to run into a hornets' nest, but only spoke as I recognized the boy. He evidently does not think you know of his treachery and is trying to lure us back."

"Yes, that is it; but keep a bright watch for boy."

the pirate schooner, for she must soon come into view around one end of the island or the other."

"The southerly end I should think, sir, with the wind where it is."

"Yes, but with this long start I feel no dread of being overhauled, Rathburn."

"Nor I, sir, for my schooner is a flyer as you have seen."

"Still the Bahama Buccaneers have fleet crafts I have heard, and I am glad night is coming on to give us a chance to dodge them."

"So am I," and Captain Harold still kept his glass upon the island.

Still, had the mate watched him closely, or been suspicious that all was not right, he would have seen that the glass steadily avoided bringing into its focus the form of the boy upon the rocks, the poor fellow who had been so cruelly deserted by Captain Harold who had made up his mind that nothing should stand between him and the getting of the Cassiday legacy.

All eyes anxiously watched the ends of the island, expecting to see a large armed schooner sweep around in chase; that is, all eyes but one, for that one knew that there was no schooner there.

But the gathering of night shades soon shut the island out of sight and no schooner appeared in chase.

Still on swept the gold-seeking craft until all alleged danger of the pirates' coming was passed and the seamen of the vessel turned in, that night, thankful that their captain had saved them from capture by the buccaneers, and wondering that the strange lad had proven so treacherous.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT LAST.

THE pretty and speedy schooner, the destinies of which Harold Hartwell held control over, sped on its way through the night, after its flight from the island where Pinto had been left under a false charge.

The course had been several times changed during the night, as though to throw a pursuer off their track, and when dawn came the schooner was running well and with a chain of islands off to starboard several leagues.

Captain Harold came on deck after breakfast and had a haggard look, as though he had passed a bad night.

He had been unable to sleep for thinking of the boy whom he had a second time deserted, for his conscience had not yet become hardened to sin.

He had deserted the boy before on the buccaneer island, leaving him in danger of death for aiding in the escape of the buccaneer prisoners.

But now he had done a still more cruel thing in deserting him upon a desolate island where he could but starve to death, and through the night the handsome face of the brave lad, as he saw it last in full trustfulness of him, when they parted upon the island, came upon him in a haunting way that drove sleep from his eyelids.

He would half-way slumber to awake with a start as he saw the youthful form on the rocks waving wildly for him not to desert him.

But the morning came at last and the light dispelled the phantoms of a guilty mind and heart.

"The boy's living would ruin all," he muttered to himself.

He recalled that the lad was the son of Claude Cassiday, whom he had determined to rob, tempted as he had been by his wife, of the whole legacy of the dead sailor whose half had been generously left to him.

The boy had shown himself capable of brave acts and a mind far beyond his years.

Should he return to his mother and sister, perhaps he, with his experience of men, might sus-

pect that all was not right and bring him to judgment.

At least so the guilty mind of Harold Hartwell conjured up trouble ahead for him.

So it was best to get rid of the boy and thus shut out all dread in that direction.

He had fallen through the temptations of his wife, and he had sinned most grievously once he had embarked in the robbery of his dead comrade's wife and children.

He had gotten hold of the treasure in the sloop, and more, he had taken life ruthlessly to destroy all traces of his wrong-doing.

Again when on his gold hunt, Pinto had crossed his path in a strange way, driven by a mysterious fate, and it lay in his power to remove him.

True, he could have taken the lad back with him, given him a small share of the treasure which should have all been his, and thus had his secret kept inviolate.

But Harold Hartwell had become avaricious in the extreme and he wished no one to share with him the fortune he longed to get possession of.

With the treasure from the sloop the legacy of Claude Cassiday would make him a very rich man, and his wife could shine in gems superior to the wealthiest ladies of the land, his beautiful little daughter Celeste could grow up to be one of the richest heiresses, while he could pass his latter days in luxury, honored by all.

This brilliant anticipation brought out of gloom the acts by which his riches were to be obtained, and the "still small voice of conscience" was kept down by the man who had played such a bold and wicked game to win.

All seemed favorable now for him to secure the treasure, and could he but get it, then the bright glimmer of the gold, the brilliant sparkle of the gems, would drive away the darkest memories of how he had obtained it.

The schooner was faster than the former one, and he felt that he need have no dread of the officers and crew as in the former expedition, while he could distance pursuit if not crippled by a shot or a storm.

So the haggard look soon passed away from the face of Harold Hartwell, and he walked the deck with a cheerful air, congratulating Mate Rathburn upon their escape again and again.

The island which he knew had been the haunt of the pirates was given a wide berth, and the one which the chart of Claude Cassiday told him was where the hidden riches lay was the one which he now headed for.

When in the sloop he had been within almost grasp of the treasure, to be driven away by the coming after him of the buccaneer pursuers who so nearly recaptured him.

Now the way seemed clear to him and his spirits rose as he neared the "promised land."

The island was sighted just at sunset, and the schooner held on her way steadily under a fair breeze.

The land loomed up ahead until at last it was decided to drop anchor.

Unable to sleep, and anxious to go ashore, Harold Hartwell told Mate Rathburn that he would take the small boat and row to a landing, while he could follow at dawn with a crew, armed with picks and shovels for digging up the treasure.

Alone he went in the boat, and, a good oarsman, he went along swiftly and steadily until he came near enough to see where he could make a landing.

At length he rounded a bold headland and entered a small bay.

But he stopped rowing with startling suddenness, for a voice broke upon his ears.

It was a voice in song singing a Spanish ballad which he had heard often before.

Then peering ahead through the darkness the outlines of a large vessel became visible.

He quickly, and as noiselessly as possible rowed to the headland, landed and made his way along the shore, keeping in the shadow of the overhanging foliage on the point, which curved inland and formed the harbor.

Soon he came to a position from which lights flashed upon his astonished gaze and with a bitter oath he hurried forth.

"The buccaneers are here on this Treasure Island!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

FOILED.

IT was some time before Captain Harold could move from the spot where he had made the, to him, terrible discovery that the Buccaneers of the Bahamas had made their retreat upon the very island where was hidden the legacy of Claude Cassiday.

At first it seemed like a judgment upon him and he was almost crushed under the blow.

But after a while he rallied his strength and began to look about him.

He would not go that far and not know all, in spite of his danger.

The pirates had evidently not seen the schooner in the offing, and it was not likely they would discover her at night.

He would therefore push forward, and see all there was to discover.

Quietly he went along the shore, keeping in the shadow until he got near enough to see that there were two schooners at anchor in the little harbor, and some small boats were hauled up on the shore out of reach of an ordinary tide.

He soon saw that the smaller schooner was the craft which the buccaneers had captured from him.

This left no doubt as to the pirate's being the band under Captain Kent.

While a prisoner of the buccaneers he had learned that they chose their retreats upon account of their strength of position and easy access to and escape from them, while they did not remain very many months upon any one island.

Nearer and nearer he crept until he came to the landing from the schooners, and making his way up into the island, he saw lights which showed the cabin homes of the pirates.

The chart of Claude Cassiday marked the hiding-place of his treasure legacy at the other end of the island; but it also stated that a landing could not be made anywhere except in the basin, or harbor, and this was not visible to any one upon a vessel's deck half a mile off-shore.

So Harold Hartwell knew that he could secretly land by night and get the treasure.

How long the buccaneers would remain upon the island, he had no means of knowing.

Perhaps they might remain a month, perhaps six months.

Suddenly he wheeled and retraced his way quickly.

He almost ran along the shore, for a sudden thought had seized him, and he was anxious to carry it out.

As he reached his boat he grew more calm, and muffling his oars with his coat, he rowed out of the harbor.

Turning the point he headed straight for the schooner, and soon came within hail.

He answered Mate Rathburn's hail promptly, and then startled that officer by ordering the boat hung at once, the anchor up, sail set and to sail away with all dispatch.

Officer Rathburn obeyed the orders promptly, and the men were personally warned about making any unnecessary noise.

When the schooner was in full flight the gold-seeker said:

"Officer Rathburn, our voyage is a fruitless one."

"Indeed, captain?"

"It certainly is."

"May I ask how so?"

"Well, there is not only a buccaneer retreat upon the island I visited, but two armed schooners, and it was very fortunate I was not seen or the presence of our vessel discovered."

"You astonish me, Captain Harold."

"I was astonished myself, Rathburn, and I tell you these islands are filled with sea-out-laws."

Then Harold told all that he had discovered, and added:

"Now head at once for home."

"For Charleston, sir?"

"Yes, for I shall pay you the price agreed upon, and then make the venture in a craft and with a crew strong enough to meet these sea-fiends and not have to run from them."

"A good idea, Captain Harold; but I only wish it was so that you could fit out this schooner as a cruiser to make the run in, and I could get the crew."

Harold was silent a moment, as in deep thought, for the offer was a tempting one to him.

But then he remembered that he was not his own master, that he no longer felt the wound which had gained for him a leave twice extended, and that it would be impossible to longer delay his return to his duties.

Then an idea came upon him to return under circumstances which would be to his credit, and he said:

"I would like to do as you suggest, Officer Rathburn, but the truth is it is not in my power to do so."

"I must return with all dispatch, so crowd on all sail for Charleston, and make port as soon as you possibly can."

"I will do so, sir," was the answer, and the schooner was kept crowded with canvas for the rest of the run.

She had fair winds all the way, and hardly had she dropped anchor one evening off Charleston, when a vessel was seen getting up anchor for a run to Philadelphia, then the seat of Government of the United States.

He had just time to pay off Mate Rathburn and get aboard the Philadelphia-bound craft, and three weeks after Mrs. Hartwell was delighted at receiving a letter from her husband.

It showed that he had returned from his gold-seeking voyage and was on his way home, for it came from Philadelphia.

Hastily breaking the seal with trembling fingers she read:

"I went on the voyage to find the island the retreat of the Bahama Buccaneers."

"Of course to land, or delay, was madness so I

returned with all haste and to-day reported here to the naval secretary, asking to be given a command for a special cruise.

"I stated that I had information from a secret source, and a chart, which would enable me to find the secret rendezvous of a band of Bahama Buccaneers, and wished to cruise at once to attack their stronghold.

"The naval secretary took the proposition at once to heart and I believe will give me a command if there is a suitable vessel within reach.

"I will write you as soon as it is decided what will be done, and in the mean time feel no fear that our prize is lost, for without the chart it could never be found I feel assured."

Such was the letter and Mrs. Hartwell could only grin and bear the delay and hope for the best in the end.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN DESPAIR.

PINTO, when he left Captain Harold, went quickly on his way to obey the order given him by his intended destroyer.

Not the shadow of a suspicion filled his breast against the man, after the story he had told of why he had been deserted upon a former occasion after the great services he had rendered.

He believed Harold to be his best friend, and looked forward soon to meeting his parents and sister before many weeks would have gone by.

Young as he had been when lost from the schooner commanded by his father, and with so many scenes crowded into his life in the three years which had gone by since then, he could not but recall his early boyhood but indistinctly.

Still he remembered the loved ones and the little home, recalled the beautiful face of his mother, the manly look of his father, and dear little Helen with her lisping tones and pretty ways.

And these he hoped to see before very long, to tell them that he had actually been a boy pirate since he left home.

True, he had never raised his hand against the defenseless, but he had been in many a combat upon a ship's deck and had really mingled with the red-handed fiends among whom his lot had been cast.

He would be glad to forget all this, he felt, once he could get away from the scenes, and he would be most willing to serve as pilot to any vessel-of-war that would be sent to hunt down the Buccaneers of the Bahamas.

Such had been the thoughts and hopes of the unfortunate boy after he had been picked up by the schooner of Harold Hartwell.

He seemed to feel that after all he had passed through, his life was being spared to some great and good accomplishment.

So he went on his way around the island, and never once looked back toward the guilty man who was plotting his death.

He had gone something over a mile when he came to a jagged reef jutting out from the island.

To go over it was impossible, and so he climbed up the steep hills upon his right to go around the spur and return to the beach again.

He at last reached a place which he could get over, and reaching the top found that he had a grand view from there.

He looked about him with admiration, and then turned to see if he could discover the schooner over on the other side of the island.

The sight that met his vision brought a loud cry from his lips.

"She has deserted us!" he cried, and he watched the schooner as she was speeding away from the island.

He then looked about him to discover a reason, supposing that some vessel coming in sight had caused her hasty departure.

But the place where he stood was the highest point on the island and commanded a view in every direction as far as the eye could reach, until its vision ended upon the horizon of sea and sky.

What had caused the schooner to go away and leave them, unless it was to desert them, for he still believed that Captain Harold had also been deserted, along with the boat's crew.

"He did not look like a man to do so mean an act," he said, referring to Officer Rathburn.

Watching the schooner he wondered if she was not going around to seek a better anchorage, and he sought to find some trace in the sky of a coming storm.

But the skies were cloudless, and the sun was going toward the horizon undimmed by the slightest haze.

Taking off his jacket and cap he waved them again and again.

But in response he saw the schooner's topsails sent up and knew that she was but hastening away the more rapidly.

Then he knew that all efforts to signal her return were useless, and he decided to return and find Captain Harold before night came on.

He concluded at last to go on around the island as he had been directed to do, and thus would he meet the captain the sooner.

So, with a last look at the flying schooner, he

descended to the shore and went on his walk around the island.

But on he went and no captain came in sight.

At last, just at sunset he turned a point which gave him another view of the side upon which the schooner had been anchored.

There, far off in the dim distance he beheld the schooner, and still with no doubt of the false man who had deserted him, he said:

"If she does not return for us we will all starve here."

In the gathering gloom he made his way along the shore.

It was slow work, and obstacles were numerous to bar his way, so that darkness overtook him.

A last glance at the schooner, when she was barely visible to his straining vision, showed that she was still flying fast away from the island.

After an hour's hard struggle, when he got several hard falls, he at last reached a spot which in the darkness he recognized as the little inlet into which he was sure the boat had come to make a landing. But no boat was there.

He then called in his clear, loud voice:

"Boat ahoy! ahoy!"

At first he started, for he was sure he got an answer.

So he repeated his hail:

"Boat ahoy! ahoy!"

The answer came back from against the cliff:

"Boat ahoy! ahoy!"

"It is but the echo of my own voice," he said in a disheartened way.

Then he called again, and again:

"Ho, Captain Harold, ho!"

But the echoes only answered him, and he became two hoarse to call more.

At last it began to dawn upon him that as the boat was gone, it must have returned to the schooner.

He had seen no boat upon the sea, and the schooner was under way when he sighted her from the hill.

It could only mean therefore that the boat had gone back to the schooner, and had not gone without orders.

But one could give such orders, and that one was the man who had before doubted him, who had asked him not to let it be known upon the schooner that they had met before, who had brought him to that island to desert him.

With a moan of despair the poor boy threw himself upon the ground and his terrible situation wrung hot tears from his eyes.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CAPTAIN KENT RECEIVES A SURPRISE.

The schooner of Kent the Bahama Buccaneer was certainly a beautiful craft.

She was graceful in hull, rakish in rig, and as fleet as a gull in flight and dangerous as a shark, with her heavy battery, fiendish crew and stern cruel commander.

She scoured the seas in defiance of the vessels-of-war ever on the watch for her, and it was the rule of her captain never to waste his time and powder on prizes of little value.

He looked for large game only, the richly freighted ships of Spain, France and England that carried cargoes to and from South America, the West Indies and European ports.

Vessels flying the American flag were sacred in his eyes, and where he always had a shot for any man-of-war of other nations than the United States, he would crowd on all sail and fly from one showing the Stars and Stripes.

He would fly too, in silence, showing no colors, answering no shot, no matter what the damage done his vessel and crew.

Such was Kent the Corsair of Southern Seas, and with his beautiful vessel Red Wings he was a man to be feared, to be shunned by all vessels not strong enough to protect themselves from his cruel horde of cut-throats.

He had named his vessel Red Wings from some fancy of his, and upon either side of her sharp bows, and serving as a figure-head was a huge crimson wing carved in wood, while in the center of each sail was a like device.

Dressing always in the uniform of a captain in the United States Navy, he attired his crew in white, their snowy skull-caps being also stamped with the red wings, so well known by mariners and so much dreaded.

Even the most thorough officer of a legitimate service could have found no fault with the discipline and ship-shape appearance of the Red Wings, from deck to truck.

Her hull was always painted a jet black, as were also her spars, while she seemed always to have a new suit of sails, so white and spotless they were.

Her officers were held to their duties without fear or favor, and her crew were made to toe the mark in man-of-war style.

Captain Kent was not a cruel man toward the defenseless.

He sought always to take a vessel without bloodshed, and never put a crew to the sword.

But did a vessel resist him to the point of doing him serious injury, then his nature became merciless.

He seldom held one cruising ground over a few days at a time, and though went to find his

way to his Bahama Island retreat, wherever it chanced to be, at least once every three months, he was often seen as far north as Point Judith, as far south as Rio Janeiro, while he cruised through the West Indies and would run the Gulf shores from Key West to Yucatan.

It was after a Gulf cruise that he was making his way to his retreat, when the water casks were reported so near empty that he decided to run in to anchorage off an island which he had visited before and where he knew there were springs of the coolest and purest water.

So the schooner was headed in as close as she dare go, the anchor was let fall and a couple of boats lowered and filled with water-casks.

Taking a fancy to go ashore for a walk, and get a cool drink directly from the springs, Captain Kent ordered his gig lowered away and was the first to reach the island.

He sprung ashore and walked rapidly up toward the springs to suddenly utter an exclamation of amazement and spring to the side of a human form he beheld lying upon the ground, in the shade of an overhanging tree which cast its shadow over the waters bubbling up from the earth.

The recumbent form suddenly moved, as the exclamation of the pirate chief rung out sharp and stern:

"Pinto! you here?"

It was indeed the lad, for the island on which the buccaneers had landed was the one where Pinto had been deserted by Harold Hartwell.

The lad arose to his feet in a bewildered way, and he seemed weak, while his face was haggard and his eyes sunken.

"Pinto, you here?" repeated the chief.

"Yes, Captain Kent, I have been here for nearly a week.

"I was sound asleep I guess, and did not know you were here," said the boy.

"My poor fellow you are ill and half starved, so come on board the schooner with me and I'll soon have you in trim, and then you can tell me all about it."

The youth acquiesced in silence, and was soon in the cabin of the Red Wings, when the negro steward of Captain Kent soon gave him some food and a glass of wine.

After awhile he felt much better and then told his story frankly to the chief, of how he aided the escape of the prisoners, and then confessed his act to save Miguel Santo.

That Santo had aided his escape he however did not tell, only stating that he had slipped off the irons, made his way out of the lock-up cabin, fitted the whale-boat out as best he could and set sail.

When picked up by the schooner that was gold-hunting, he discovered in her commander the very man who had deserted him, and a second time did the same thing toward him.

Captain Kent listened with deepest interest to all, asking a question here and there, and at last said:

"So the Island Captain sailed in chase of the sloop?"

"Yes, sir."

"And was away when you made your escape?"

"Yes, chief."

"And Santo was left in command of the island?"

"He was, senor."

"Marco seems to hate Santo, I believe?"

"He appears jealous of him, senor."

"Yes, and they are rivals for command and my favor, so I will have to settle this matter on my return."

"But Marco failed to capture the sloop, you say?"

"Yes, sir, for Captain Harold commanded the schooner that picked me up, and he said they barely escaped being retaken by Marco."

"And this Harold is now treasure-hunting here on another vessel?"

"Yes, Captain Kent."

"Well, we must find him if we can, and I'll punish him by leaving him alone on an island; but now I have something to say to you, Pinto."

"Yes, chief," was the quiet response of Pinto, who, however, saw that his chief was in no humor for trifling.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PARDON ON CONDITIONS.

THE water-casks were soon filled, the boats swung at their davits, and the Red Wings sailed on her course once more for the retreat of the buccaneers.

"Pinto," said the chief, after he had heard all that occurred, and he looked very serious.

"Yes, chief."

"Do you know that you have done an act which has placed your head in the noose?"

"You mean, senor, in rescuing the prisoners?"

"I do."

"You did not take them as prisoners, senor, but they came to the island and I felt sorry for them."

"And so proved a traitor to me?"

"I did not so mean it, senor."

"You are not then the true boy I thought you, toward me and my band?"

"I did not join you from a desire to be an outlaw, chief, but because I couldn't help it."

"I have a home, parents, and a dear little sister, and I often have wished to see them."

"I did not think I was doing any great wrong to you in helping the men get away, and I wanted to go with them."

"But was deserted by those whom you served?"

"Yes, chief."

"You were a brave fellow to confess your guilt to save Miguel Santo."

"It was but my duty, sir."

"And why did you escape afterward?"

"I feared you would hang me, sir," was the simple response.

"Then you feel that you deserve death?"

"No, senor, not for doing what I deemed right; but I am in your power, senor, my life is at your mercy," was the polite but fearless response.

"Pinto, you are too brave a lad to be sacrificed for a wrong you have done."

"I was in hopes that you had become my friend, as well as my young aide and officer, that I could trust you wholly, and now I find that you are anxious to leave me, and to do so aided men to escape who have carried off the peoples' treasure."

"I am sorry, chief, but I meant no treachery to you, and could I have betrayed you to a cruiser I would not have done so."

"You have been most kind to me in every way, and yet I have those who love me in my own home and have longed to see them."

"Some day you may do so, in fact I pledge you that you shall, for I pardon you now for your act, but upon one condition."

"Yes, chief, and I thank you."

"You accept the condition?"

"I do, sir."

"It is that you shall die the moment you are guilty of aiding another prisoner, disloyalty to me or my band or an attempt to escape."

"I accept the conditions, Senor Chief."

"See that you do not break them, Pinto."

"Now get what rest you can, for to-morrow you are to report for duty on shipboard."

The lad bowed and retired to his berth, the one in the chief's cabin which had always been his when on board ship.

The next night the Red Wings ran into the harbor of the buccaneer island.

But all was darkness there and this told that the isle had been deserted by the band.

The anchors were let fall and the chief gave orders to await in the harbor until dawn, when it would be discovered whether the buccaneers had gone.

He felt no anxiety, as it was his orders to the Island Captain always to change retreats when anything occurred to attract attention to the island, and the escape of the prisoners taken was certainly cause enough for a change.

When the dawn came, upon the rocks were visible some strange characters in green, around a pair of red wings, painted upon the rocks.

To all except the officers of the schooner these characters were unknown.

But Pinto went ashore and deciphered them readily and soon after the schooner set sail.

The characters had been the key to the whereabouts of the Island Buccaneers, and the Red Wings was at once headed under full sail for that point.

The island chosen by Marco, upon his return from the fruitless chase of the fugitives in the sloop, happened to be the very one where Harold had intended landing to find the Cassidy treasure.

He was driven away by the coming of the schooner in sight, and having noted the island as he passed by in pursuit, Island Captain Marco decided to bring the band there.

This he had done, leaving the key by which to find him painted upon the rocks of the island they deserted, where, as has been said, it was seen by the chief.

The new retreat was equally as good a one as the island just deserted, for there was a fair harbor upon one end which had no visible entrance from a short distance away.

But when its location was known, a vessel could run in and rest in almost any weather, and the anchorage was so well protected that it was thoroughly safe for a vessel even in a severe hurricane.

Not another part of the island had a safe harborage, and the nature of the shores was such as to prevent a landing upon them even in quiet weather.

And upon this island had Lieutenant Claude Cassidy, after the loss of the cutter's crew, made a landing, bearing with him the treasure he had found through digging the graves for his lost comrades.

He had been cruising close along the shore, being alone in the cutter, and he had thought that he could discover evidence that a harborage could be found there, so headed in until it appeared before him, a bold and rugged point of land, like a sheltering arm, jutting out and overlapping another headland, but appearing like one unbroken shore, unless within a cable's length of it.

And here had Claude Cassidy buried his treasure, here had his treacherous brother officer sought it, to twice have it almost in his grasp and then be driven off.

And upon this island, Marco had established the retreat of the buccaneers, and thither did Captain Kent head the Red Wings in search of him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RIVALS.

THE Red Wings arrived off the island of the buccaneers at night, and as Captain Kent had several times sought a haven there before, he ran in to an anchorage.

He was promptly signaled from the shore, and the chief was glad to find the people upon the alert, though it was late.

He found at anchor there the schooner captured from Lieutenant Harold Hartwell, and, as though afraid to trust her under a guard, Captain Marco himself and a couple of men were on duty, but no one on board had discovered the coming in of the Red Wings until the signal had come from shore.

"A brighter watch is kept ashore, Pinto, than on the schooner," said Captain Kent to the lad who stood near the chief at the helm.

"Yes, sir, they discovered us first from the shore; but shall I call a boat away for you to land, senor?"

"No, I shall turn in now and land in the morning, and order back any boat that may come off."

With this the captain gave the order to let go the anchor and went into the cabin.

Soon after a boat put off from the prize, but was hailed promptly by Pinto and ordered back.

His voice surprised Captain Marco, who was in the boat, and he called out:

"Who hails me?"

"That does not concern you, sir, so return to your schooner," was the sharp response of the lad who was officer of the watch.

Soon after, as Captain Marco put back, a second boat appeared, this time coming from the shore.

Marco's boat was seen to rest on its oars until the one from the shore was hailed.

"Boat ahoy," hailed the clear voice of Pinto.

"Ahoy, the Red Wings!" was the answer in a voice which Pinto recognized as Miguel Santo's, as he had before known Captain Marco.

"What do you wish?"

"To see Captain Kent, senor, if it is the chief's pleasure."

"I am Miguel Marco."

"It is not the chief's pleasure, for he has turned in; but he will come ashore in the morning," answered Pinto.

"Ay, ay, senor," and the boat put back as had Marco's.

The buccaneers began to feel a little impatient the next morning, when they discovered that Captain Kent took his time in coming ashore.

The chief first had his breakfast and then was rowed away from the schooner in his barge, Pinto accompanying him.

Captain Marco was upon the deck of the prize, supposing of course the chief would come aboard first; but the cutter headed directly for a landing, and he sprung into a gig and sculled himself ashore as quickly as he could.

When he reached there the chief, accompanied by Pinto, had gone on up among the cabins.

Miguel Santo had met his chief at the landing, and had started, turning pale as he beheld Pinto.

But the latter gave him a quick, significant look, as though to show him that he had not betrayed him, and then Santo saluted his chief.

"Who noted the coming of my vessel last night, Senor Santo?" asked the chief, as he stepped ashore.

"I did, senor, for I was on watch."

"You keep good watch, Senor Santo."

"Thanks, Senor Chief; but I am glad to welcome you back, as matters do not go just right ashore of late, and I am glad to see the lad, Pinto, return, for I am accused of having set him free."

"No one who knows your devilish nature, Santo, would make an accusation against your having erred on the side of mercy," was the satirical rejoinder of the chief.

"Especially in setting that lad free, Senor Chief."

"Well, who accuses you?"

"He comes here, chief, Captain Marco."

Marco just then came up and his face wore a troubled look as he beheld Pinto with his chief, and that Miguel Santo had been the first to make a report.

"Ah, chief, I am happy at your return, senor, for I have much to report to you; but it is remarkable that I see the young Senor Pinto with you."

"Oh, he felt that matters were not going right here, when my back was turned, so came to find me and report," said the chief dryly.

"You did not know that he proved a traitor, Senor Chief, for, that he would not tell?"

"Oh yes, he set the prisoners free, and rather than have you hang Miguel Santo for the act of

which he was guiltless, he confessed what he had done, and was put in irons by you."

"But he escaped, was picked up by me and now comes to face the charge you have to make against him."

"Well, Senor Chief, I make the charge of treachery, for he is a self-confessed traitor, having released the prisoners and aided them to escape in the sloop, carrying our treasure with them."

"Did you not pursue?"

"Yes, sir, as soon as I got the schooner from aground, for he cut her cable and allowed her to drift ashore."

"I came up with the sloop, but she outfooted me, and in a storm and night was enabled to escape."

"The boy has reported all, Senor Marco, so what other charge have you to make?"

"I accuse Senor Santo also of treachery, for I believe that he aided the lad's escape, for it was his boat that Pinto took, and more, senor, since I accused Senor Santo of aiding the prisoners to escape, though the charge was a mistake, he has been acting without my authority."

"In what has he disobeyed you, Captain Marco?"

"He seeks to secure my berth as Island Captain."

"Do you wish the place, Senor Santo?"

"I do, chief, if you deem me worthy of the place."

"And you are satisfied to retain it, Senor Captain Marco?"

"I am, chief, for I have done my duty toward you and our people in all things."

"Yet you allowed the prisoners you took to escape and carry the treasure with them, and though giving chase failed to overhaul them."

"You accused Santo of aiding them, though innocent, and then permitted Pinto to escape—"

"I was absent, Senor Chief, when the lad escaped."

"As Island Captain you were responsible, Senor Marco, and I look to you alone."

"Also, you have allowed Senor Santo to come forward openly as your rival, when you should have had him shot at the first claim he made to stepping into your place."

"You are therefore rivals, you and Santo, and I shall let the best man hold the place," was the significant remark of the buccaneer chief.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A BUCCANEER DUEL.

CAPTAIN MARCO did not like the humor in which his chief had returned to the island.

He seemed to feel that Captain Kent placed the blame upon him for having allowed the prisoners to escape, in spite of being aided by the lad Pinto, and also to carry with them the treasure which was in the sloop.

He condemned him also for not having overhauled and recaptured the prisoners after sighting and giving chase to them.

That Pinto also had been allowed to escape he censured him for.

For one who was left in command of the retreat there must be no such mistakes, and Captain Kent allowed no dereliction of duty.

He censured Captain Marco for allowing any rivalry on the part of Miguel Santo not to meet immediate punishment.

So he called the people together and when all were assembled he said in his terse stern way:

"Island Commander Marco, you are to be praised for your capture of the prize schooner now lying at anchor in the harbor, and also for the prompt and able manner in which you selected this island and brought the people to it."

"In many respects it is unequalled, for to a vessel lying outside the harbor in a storm it is sure destruction, with the coral-reefs dotting the sea for leagues in a circle, so that it is a very safe retreat."

"But you have spoiled your good acts by allowing your prisoners to escape—"

"Through that lad's treachery only, Senor Chief."

"That is not the question, Senor Marco, for you should have guarded against all treachery, trusting no one but yourself."

"You lost with your prisoners, the treasure of the people here, and when you gave chase, you failed to recapture the craft and your prisoners."

"When you found that they had gone you showed a petty spite in accusing one of treachery, whom you hated and feared as a rival for the berth you hold."

"But for the pluck of the really guilty one, you would have executed your enemy, Santo, thus ridding yourself of one whom you feared."

"I fear no man, Senor Chief," hotly said Marco.

"That is to be proven, Senor Captain Marco," was the quiet response of the chief.

Then, after a pause, he continued:

"You again allowed this lad to escape, and once more accused Senor Santo of aiding him, knowing how groundless was your charge against him."

"Now, disobedience, treachery, and neglect of duty in the league of the Buccaneers of the Bahamas is punishable with death."

"You allowed my vessel to run in at night unseen, until a signal from the shore acquainted you with the fact of my coming."

"I have been lenient toward Pinto, the lad, as I have my own reasons for being, but should he attempt to escape again, or to prove treacherous, I shall make an example of him, though I shall allow no officer to do so."

"The lad is amenable to me alone, and he knows, and is pledged to the alternative if he does ought to deserve it in future."

"As I have been lenient with him, so will I be with you, for your punishment I leave for you to avert, or receive, as I shall make Senor Santo your executioner, or you his."

"Senor Chief!"

"I mean just what I say, Senor Marco, this rivalry among my people shall end, and as you wish to hold the position of Island Captain, you will have to prove yourself worthy of it."

"Senor Santo also wishes the berth, and as you have twice wronged him by false charges, you shall be answerable to him for it, and he must fight for the place if he would have it."

"I am content, Senor Chief," quickly said Miguel Santo.

Marco was taken aback by the proposition of the chief.

He liked the command of the retreat, and yet he knew that Miguel Santo was a very dangerous foe to meet in combat.

But he dared not refuse to meet him, as he would at once be reduced in rank with Miguel Santo placed over him, while he would lose caste with all of the buccaneers.

He had ruled with a high hand, and for his many cruel acts he would be held responsible he well knew.

The quick response of Santo, that he was willing for the meeting between them, he could not but echo, for the chief was no man to trifle with, and should he decline the combat with his rival, he might at once order him strung up on board the schooner for his allowing the prisoners to escape.

So he said:

"I am willing to give Senor Santo satisfaction, Senor Chief, for having wronged him, and I certainly prize the berth you have honored me with sufficiently high to risk my life in bolding it."

"Very well, senors, Pinto will select the weapons and arrange for the duel at once," said the chief almost indifferently.

The lad did not appear to relish the duty set him to perform, but at once entered upon it by asking:

"Will swords suit you, senors?"

He knew that Santo was a most dangerous hand with a blade, and after the man's kind act toward him he wished him to be the victor.

Santo understood the lad's act and quickly said:

"Yes, swords are the weapons of course, as Senor Marco prides himself upon handling a blade."

"I would prefer pistols, Senor Pinto, as more sure," growled Marco, whose deadly aim all knew.

"I have decided upon swords," was the cool response of the lad, and he at once called the combatants to position and placed the weapons in their hands.

The crowd of buccaneers gathered eagerly about, while Chief Kent looked on with the air of a man who was glad to witness a superb sword combat between giants.

The blades crossed with a clash, and the look of each man showed that he meant to fight to the death.

A grand battle it was too, from the crossing of the swords until Marco was run through the heart by Miguel Santo, who turned and said quietly:

"Senor Chief, I await your orders."

"Take command of the retreat as Island Captain, Senor Santo, and as you know your duties see that you make no mistakes," and the chief walked away accompanied by Pinto.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE STORM BIRD.

It was a long and tedious wait that Lieutenant Harold Hartwell had in Philadelphia, to get the vessel.

He stood well with the Naval Secretary, but it was no easy matter just then to find a vessel large enough to overmatch a buccaneer cruiser, if it came to a battle, and at the same time cruise in the waters where Lieutenant Hartwell would have to go upon his mission of outlaw-hunting.

He had not given his authority for knowing just where the buccaneer retreat was, but had said he had undoubted proof of where to find the outlaw island.

He had not dared say that he had been on a cruise there and found the island himself.

To his wife he wrote often, telling her he still had hopes of being given a vessel for the special duty he desired to go upon.

That lady was living upon "hope deferred" and becoming very anxious to get possession of the pirate treasure so that she could cut a dash with the riches.

The treasure brought in the sloop served well

to help along, for it gained for them more luxuries, permitted an enlargement of the house and new furniture, while an extra servant was kept and a carriage and horses purchased.

Mrs. Hartwell's friends set it all down to an inheritance she had lately come in possession of, and which had been but a couple of thousand dollars; but the clever heiress to a small sum had hinted that it was a large fortune and the actions of the lady went to prove it.

Mrs. Hartwell came out also in some rare old laces worth a snug sum, worse silks and satins, and among the heirlooms which she said had come to her were several very rare sets of jewelry.

When money was needed Mrs. Hartwell had sent a valuable case of jewels to her husband in Philadelphia, and he had turned them into cash.

The last letter received from his wife however had fretted Hartwell.

He had been living at the best hotel himself in Philadelphia, while awaiting a ship, spending his money freely and enjoying life, and when his wife wrote:

"We have but one more lot in the secret box, and it will hardly bring over a couple of thousand, so that you must bestir yourself to get a ship."

"I am afraid you have been too extravagant yourself."

The lieutenant at once "hit back" with a letter which said:

"You accuse me of extravagance, when I have spent but a thousand during my stay here, and that too of a treasure which I suffered much in mind and body to rescue."

"You forget that you kept out five of the most valuable sets as 'heirlooms,' with silks, satins and laces sufficient to last you your lifetime."

"You have also put a couple of thousand upon the house, as much more in improving the grounds, while with furniture, horses, a carriage and entertainments a large sum has gone."

"What remains I insist shall be held in case I have to fit out another craft to get what I hope for, and which I shall have to take big chances to secure."

"Of course to secure it when I go in a vessel-of-war will be impossible, for then it becomes prize-money for my officers and crew."

"My desire in going in a vessel-of-war is simply to clear the island and waters of buccaneers for my future run here in a small craft to get the treasure."

"So stop the leak at your end of the line and touch not a dollar of the reserve I left there, I beg of you."

This letter quite startled Mrs. Hartwell, as well as angered her.

She realized that she had been the one to make the money fly, yet she begrudged her husband the sum he was spending because it made no "show."

She saw, however, that she must curtail, and to do so and not show a weakening in her fortune through her grand entertainments, she pleaded the invalid as an excuse and her house was closed to her former gay guests, who could not believe that she had given other than the proper excuse for a cessation of her extravagant hospitalities.

One morning Mrs. Hartwell was surprised by a visitor who was none other than her husband.

"I have my vessel at last," he said.

"It is a brig purchased in Boston, and I am to fit her out and man her at once."

"But it will be a full month before I can get off on my cruise, and already have I waited over six months."

The brig purchased by the Government was as trim a craft as a sailor's heart could desire.

She was of three hundred tons burden, carried an enormous spread of sail and had been built for a Gulf trader and packet craft, with an eye to speed and seaworthiness especially.

Her builder and captain had died just as she was completed, and his widow offered the vessel for sale, and the Government ordered Harold Hartwell to inspect her, and if found satisfactory to purchase her for the navy and fit her out for the mission he wished to go upon.

A fine seaman, Hartwell had found the brig better than he had expected in spite of the extravagant praise bestowed upon her, and he at once so reported and the purchase was made.

He had her sides pierced for six guns, and mounted three pivots, forward amidships and aft, of large caliber, which gave her a broadside of nine pieces.

He picked a crew of ninety men, and twelve officers were ordered to him, and all were set to work getting the vessel ready for sea.

Upon her trial trip she showed great speed, and yet Harold Hartwell made improvements in her rig which added largely to her sail area which he knew would make her one of the fastest vessels afloat, and one that would ride out a hurricane in summer seas like the one for which she was named—the Storm Bird.

At last all was in readiness for sea, and Captain Harold Hartwell, for he had been promoted, gave a farewell entertainment on board his beautiful vessel which was long remembered by the many guests who were there.

Mrs. Hartwell was there, brilliant in diamonds, and looking strangely well for an invalid, and she was delighted at the chance to make a grand show.

The papers gave the Storm Bird a grand send-off and predicted the utter sweeping off the seas of all pirates when the Storm Bird should begin her duties under so gallant a commander as was Captain Harold Hartwell.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TOO LATE.

THE Storm Bird sailed away from Boston in a stiff breeze, carrying all sail when all other vessels met were under lower sails alone.

She stood up to her work splendidly, went by a score of vessels outward bound as though they were anchored, and dropping Boston Light astern sped upon her pirate-hunting mission.

The officers and men of the Storm Bird all knew their commander by reputation, and a few had sailed with him before.

They knew that he had won fame as a midshipman, had added honors as he rose in rank, and though he had once lost a vessel in the Bahamas, it was not his fault, as the craft had been weak-hulled and the leak sprung in a hurricane sent her to the bottom.

They knew that as an officer upon the sloop-of-war Emerald he had been efficient and popular, and in a skirmish with Mexican bandits, where a brother officer, Lieutenant Claude Cassidy had lost his life, Harold Hartwell, though severely wounded, had stood by his dying comrade until help arrived.

Now he had been made an acting captain, with the knowledge that if his cruise was a successful one the real rank would be conferred upon him.

With such a commander, a craft like the Storm Bird, fleet, stanch and splendidly armed, a crew of picked officers and men, over a hundred in number, great things were expected by the Government to be the result of the cruise.

Perfectly charmed was Harold Hartwell with his beautiful vessel as she sped out to sea, where he soon put her under cruising canvas when the sea grew rough.

She rode the waves indeed like a sea bird, and all the while would glide along at a speed that won the admiration of all on board, from commander to cook and cabin-boy.

Captain Hartwell at once began his duties in disciplining and drilling his crew, and gave them to understand that every man should do his duty, while, as the brig was going on a special mission, the capture of pirate haunts and vessels brought in large sums in prize money.

Of his own affairs he had nothing to say, but he hoped to find the buccaneers upon the treasure island, and by capturing the retreat would gain fame, while he could ascertain while there all about the Cassidy legacy.

Then he hoped to run down Kent the Buccaneer and afterward go after the fortune he so longed to possess in some small vessel, when having won fame and riches he would be content.

Such were his ambitions and he had left behind him a wife living on the same food of golden hope, and anticipating her grand triumphs when the wealth they had sinned to obtain had been won.

Knowing as he so well did the locality of the treasure island, where the buccaneers had established their retreat, after leaving the island where he had lost his schooner and from which, through Pinto's aid he had escaped, Harold Hartwell had at once beaded for it.

He had little fear that the treasure would be found, and still with half-a-hundred buccaneers dwelling upon the island he knew that there was some danger of its being discovered.

He was therefore anxious to get there with all dispatch, after his long delay in waiting for a vessel.

The chart showed him that though the vicinity of the island was very dangerous in bad weather and sure destruction to a vessel off the north coast in a gale, still there was a good harbor there, and should he capture the retreat he could afford to lie in wait for the coming of Captain Kent in his schooner, and then capture him.

Such was the plan and it was a good one if properly executed.

The chart of the approach to the island was studied on the way there, and Captain Hartwell came to the conclusion that he needed good weather to run in by, and daylight as well.

The league island was so completely surrounded by reefs, small coral islands and shoals, that it would require skillful navigation to go into the harbor if there was even a moderate sea and stiff breeze.

At last the Bahamas were sighted, and the island chain kept in view upon the starboard side from aloft, until Captain Hartwell knew that he was nearing the island of the buccaneers.

Just as he was hoping to reach the retreat the next day, the brig was caught in a hurricane, which tested her powers to the utmost, and proved her all that could be desired as a sea boat.

When the storm ended the brig was headed for the island, and in pleasant weather would slowly go through the reef-dotted waters toward the treasure island.

Captain Hartwell stood by the helmsman, directing the course, and just as officers and men wondered where he was to find a haven in the rugged island, there opened before them the inlet between the jutting point and the encircling headland.

Not a sign of the island being inhabited was discovered, and when the Storm Bird had glided to an anchorage, there still was not a human being visible.

The face of Captain Hartwell became stern as he gave the orders to lower the boats for a landing.

The anchor was let fall, several of the crew's men still kept at the guns, and then four boats were lowered, filled with armed men, and pulled for the shore.

A landing was made and an advance up into the island, where the Americans came upon the ashes of the homes of the buccaneers, for all had been burned, and certainly some weeks before the arrival of the Storm Bird.

Night came on and the men encamped on shore, and then taking advantage of the moonlight, Harold Hartwell went off alone, for a stroll of the island.

Several of his officers asked to accompany him, saying that the island might not be deserted after all; but he had no dread of danger and declined their company.

The next morning the crew of the Storm Bird were in great alarm, for Captain Hartwell had not returned from his walk, and could not be found.

Most mysteriously he had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE YOUNG SCHEMER.

So much did Kent the Buccaneer like his new retreat, that he gave orders to Santo the commander of the island stronghold, to remain there unless positively forced to depart from it.

The Red Wings, after being overhauled thoroughly, started off upon another gold-seeking voyage. Pinto was taken along—Captain Kent determining to keep the boy under his immediate eye.

Kind to him he certainly was; he could not have been more so to his own son: and whatever the chief was to others the lad found him only generous toward him.

And Pinto appreciated it, though he understood not the hidden motive of Captain Kent in his behavior to him.

He did not know the joy Captain Kent had felt in finding him, on account of the revenge he would have in bringing up the son of his old lady love, Helen Marcy, and Claude Cassidy, his successful rival, as a pirate.

But as he knew more of the daring, handsome boy, the heart of Kent the Buccaneer went out toward him with a sad affection, and he found in the lad a link to connect him with the past, and which link he would not sever for a good deal.

He was glad to have the boy with him, and as Pinto was made a junior officer on the Red Wings the lad rather enjoyed the change from life on the island, while Captain Kent felt that he was safe when with him.

One afternoon, three months after the leaving of the Red Wings, a schooner was sighted from the island lookout.

Santo sounded the alarm and had the islanders ready to resist a foe if necessary.

But soon it was seen to be the Red Wings, with her topmasts hosed, or shot away, and looking rather dilapidated generally.

She ran into the harbor and dropped anchor, and then it was discovered that the Red Wings had captured valuable prizes, but had been met at night in a fog by the American sloop-of-war Emerald, and very nearly captured.

Not a shot had Captain Kent returned, while he had received the terrible fire of the large cruiser in silence, and only escaped by his skill and daring from capture.

The Red Wings had been badly cut up, her topmasts shot away, her bulwarks crushed in and four of her guns dismantled, while her sails had been riddled.

Then too one of her officers had been slain, Pinto had been wounded and a dozen dead seamen lay upon her decks not to speak of the injured.

But the speed of the Red Wings and her splendid handling had drawn her out of the one-sided battle, and she had outfooted the Emerald in fine style.

Once she had lost sight of her pursuer, the Red Wings had run for the rendezvous upon the island and the wounded were taken ashore.

Pinto was carried to the cabin of the chief, when ashore, and Santo, who had been a surgeon in the Spanish Navy was ordered to devote himself to him above all others.

Several weeks passed away and the Red Wings had again resumed her old look, for there were sails in quantity, spars and paint in abundance at the island to put her in shipshape order, and it had been done.

The wounded had many of them reported for

duty again, but Pinto was still very lame from his wound.

The result was that Captain Kent sailed upon another cruise, leaving the youth upon the island and promising to return for him within a couple of months, and sooner if his his cruising brought him nearer.

"Lad, I don't understand that wound of yours, for it has healed nicely and yet you seem very lame," said Captain Santo to Pinto one day, when he made his call upon him at the chief's quarters, which the lad occupied.

"It is strange; but it is improving," said Pinto, and he submitted to a thorough examination of the wounded leg, for Santo was anxious to help the boy to recovery, not only on his own account, but to gain favor with the chief for his skill as a surgeon.

"The men told me, Pinto, that the chief would not allow a shot to be fired at the American sloop-of-war, though they were in the greatest danger of being taken."

"It is so, senor."

"Chief Kent will never fire upon an American vessel."

"He is an American, senor."

"And I am a Spaniard, was in fact in the navy of Spain, but I would rob a vessel under the Spanish flag, or fight a cruiser flying the colors as quickly as I would a craft of any other nation."

"Well, the chief will not, as I know, having often seen him tried, senor."

"He will rob an American vessel?"

"Yes, a richly freighted craft, but he will not fire upon them to do so, nor does he burn the ships flying the Stars and Stripes."

"He is a strange man, and a remarkable one too, for he is a splendid seaman, a perfect commander and brave as a lion."

"He is making a splendid officer of you too, Pinto."

"Thank you, senor."

Soon after Santo left the cabin, and had he seen the youth get up and walk across the room without his crutches and no sign of a limp, he would have been amazed.

"I must get away from here before the schooner comes back, for I feel more and more how wicked is the life I am leading."

"It is a great risk to run, to go alone in Santo's sloop, but then the buccaneers can not follow and I can run by night and land by day upon the islands for rest, and I'll be careful not to be picked up again unless I know what the vessel is."

"In another week I will start, for by that time I can lay aside provisions enough, and I must go in a storm, for no watch is kept in stormy weather."

This musing aloud of the lad showed that the threat of death had not deterred him from making another effort to escape.

In the island harbor was a sloop-rigged craft of some ten tons, known as Santo's ship, for the Island Captain used it for short cruises about the island, and in case the people had to seek another retreat there was the prize schooner taken from Harold Hartwell.

To cripple the schooner and sail in the sloop was Pinto's plan of escape, and he was playing a bold game to do so, with death as the result of his failure.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE STRANGE BRIG.

ONE pleasant afternoon some days after the visit of Island Captain Santo to Pinto, when the buccaneer surgeon could not account for the continued lameness of his patient, the lookout kept by day on the highest point of the island reported a sail in sight.

The stranger was made out to be a brig-of-war, from her build and rig an American, though she showed no colors from which to decide her nationality.

She was a large brig, heavily armed and manned, and her appearance so near the island spread consternation among the buccaneers.

Captain Santo at once sought the cabin where Pinto dwelt and told him that the brig carried fully twenty guns and a crew of over a hundred men.

"She has a fair breeze, and with lookouts aloft forward, is steering pretty safely in toward the island, but whether on a general search, or because she knows what to find here I do not know," said Santo.

"What will you do, Senor Santo, if she comes in?"

"She can hardly do so without a pilot, which she has not got, for if she had, she would not be feeling her way."

"But she can send her boats in."

"Ah yes, but then we can sink them I guess with our two twelves, and, with the women on the cliffs to help us, we can pour in a hot fire of musketry and beat them off."

"When she goes away we must seek another retreat, that is all, Pinto."

"Yes, senor," said the lad, and at the urgent request of Santo, who wished to make no mistake in the eyes of the chief, and so sought for a foil in the boy, Pinto took his crutches and went up to have a look at the brig.

She was standing in through the encircling reefs and was heading as though for a landing upon the island, rather than to sail by to open water some leagues beyond.

She was little over a league and a half from the island, and did she, after passing between two reef isles, head for the end of the island retreat, there she was surely coming to anchor and going to send her boats to make a landing if they knew where to find one.

The boy and Santo watched her eagerly from a hiding-place in the foliage.

A fair breeze was blowing and she was coming bravely on.

"She is going to send her boats out, lad," said Santo anxiously, as she passed through the reef and headed straight for the end of the island where the harbor was.

"Yes, but they may not be able to find the entrance, senor, unless there is some one aboard who knows of it."

"I hope they may not; but oh! for a hurricane to catch them here!"

"Then all on board would be lost."

"Without a doubt, for the only refuge would be to get into our harbor, and that she cannot do without a skillful pilot, yes, and a daring one too."

They watched the brig closely until they saw her run up within a mile of the island.

Then suddenly her sails flapped and her headway stopped.

"Pinto!" almost shouted Senor Santo.

"Yes, senor."

"Do you see that?"

"She is becalmed."

"Yes."

"It will be followed by a storm."

"Sure."

"Then the brig will be wrecked."

"There is a shadow of a chance for her, Pinto."

"See she has let fall her anchors."

"Yes, and is taking in sail."

"And lowering away her boats."

This last seemed to startle Santo, for he called out quickly:

"Then I must get to my post and have the people ready."

"Come, Pinto, come as fast as you can, for I wish you to command the two guns."

"Yes senor," said the lad as Captain Santo bounded away.

But he seemed in no hurry to grasp the honor thrust upon him and still watched the brig.

There were four boats lowered and they were being filled with armed men in a deliberate sort of way that showed the brig's commander felt that he had a duty to perform and meant to do it.

Then Pinto walked down the hill leisurely upon his crutches until he reached a masked battery of two guns, commanding the entrance to the secret harbor.

There were eight men here, and over on the headland were the buccaneers in force, men, women and the larger children, some half hundred all told, and they were armed with muskets, with plenty of other weapons at hand.

From the brig nothing could be seen of their preparations for battle and the island looked deserted.

As Pinto reached the battery, Captain Santo came up and said that all was in readiness for the resistance that was to be made.

"We will let the boats come in under the headland, Pinto, and then you open with your guns, and you ought to sink a couple of them."

"Then our people can pour in a fire of musketry, and if we don't send them back to the brig half the number that came out I am very much mistaken."

"Now let us have a look at them," and Santo led the way to the point of lookout.

They soon reached it and the boats were seen to have left the brig and they were within half a mile of the island, but pulling in a direction which caused Santo to remark:

"They do not know the harbor, Pinto, for see, they are pulling straight for the shore to hunt for a landing."

"Now we have them!"

"Hark, senor!"

As he uttered the words Pinto placed his hand upon the arm of the Island Captain.

"*El tornado!*" shouted Santo with almost fiendish joy, as he glanced behind him whithern had been heard the ominous sound which had caught the ears of the lad.

"Yes, senor, there will be a hurricane," said the boy.

"And that saves us and destroys yonder cursed vessel-of-war."

"Hark! that thunder grows louder, and the storm will come soon after nightfall."

"They hear the rumble of the storm upon the brig, senor, for see, they are recalling their boats," said Pinto.

A gun flashed from the bows of the brig, and up to the peak was now sent the Stars and Stripes, which showed the vessel's nationality, while the boats going shoreward at once began to circle around to put back for the brig.

"We are saved, Pinto!" cried Santo.

"And that beautiful vessel with all on board will be lost," was the low response of the lad.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A DARING SWIMMER.

CAPTAIN SANTO, in his great joy at seeing the boats put back to the brig, sprung down the path to acquaint the buccaneers of their good fortune.

He was willing and ready to make the fight, and would have been proud of the honor of beating back the brig's crew, but then he did not like Americans, and he rather dreaded an attack from them, knowing that they had a way of overcoming the greatest of obstacles.

They might beat them off, but the storm coming up would solve all doubts by destroying the brig utterly.

Then Santo knew that if the brig was wrecked the currents there would drive all the wreckage upon the island, and the booty might be considerable.

So Santo ran down to congratulate the buccaneers upon their prospects, while Pinto remained at the lookout.

The lad saw that the storm was sweeping up from a point of the compass which always brought a terrible tornado, as he knew from experience.

He saw that the brig would be driven directly upon the headland reef and go to pieces, and that for a soul to escape would be impossible.

He knew that a dozen anchors would never hold upon that hard bottom, but that the brig would draw them along at a terrible pace when the hurricane caught her in its grasp.

The boats soon reached the brig and were quickly hauled up to the davits and lashed there.

Then the topmasts were lowered and another anchor was let fall, while all sails, except just enough to steady the vessel, if forced to use them, were tightly furled.

"That captain knows what he is about."

"I guess he's been caught in these hurricanes before; but the poor fellow does not know that no anchor will hold on the bottom about this island," mused Pinto as he watched proceedings aboard the brig.

The mutterings of the storm were now growing louder and louder, and as the sun touched the horizon the dark clouds began to skurry across the heavens making darkness come on before nightfall.

For a long while the boy watched the rising tempest, still far off, and the brig which he looked upon as doomed.

Then he said in a low, determined way:

"I must do it, and I will."

He made his way down the hill upon his crutches and found Captain Santo at the battery.

He had just returned from the headland, where he had dismissed the people from duty, and had come to do the same for the gunners.

"We need do nothing more, men, until tomorrow, when we will reap the harvest the storm will gather in for us," he heard Captain Santo say, and the gunners left the battery and went to their respective cabins.

"Well, Pinto, there will be no fight," called out Santo.

"No, senor, but the brig will be wrecked."

"That is certain; but you better get your supper and turn in, for you look pale, lad, and I fear I have been moving you about too much to-day."

"I will go to my cabin, senor," said the lad, and he hobbled away upon his crutches.

Once there he closed the door and took from a hiding-place a belt heavy with gold.

This he buckled about his waist, and then resuming his crutches left the cabin.

It was dark now and the howling of the tempest could be heard not many leagues away, and growing louder and louder.

Leaving the path the lad hurried along the ridge, keeping toward the headland, or arm that formed the shelter to the harbor of the island.

The cliff was bold there, with only one way to get down to the sea, and that was by a leap of some thirty feet.

But the lad had often made the leap, to the admiration of the buccaneers, and swam around into the harbor.

To have entered the water in the harbor and swam around to the cliff, would have been a quarter of a mile, and this Pinto determined to save himself.

To get a boat was impossible, for they had all been drawn far out in anticipation of the tempest, and he could not get one alone back into the sea.

Did he attempt to go that way, also, the chances were that he would be seen.

The schooner lay under double anchors in the harbor, and though no watch was kept on board, still there would be men prowling along the haven shore looking to it that their nets and boats were in safety.

So Pinto took the headland path, his crutches ready should he meet any one, and the chances were that some of the buccaneers might be out upon the point watching the brig.

But no one was there, the supper hour having lured them to their quarters.

Glancing out over the dark waters, the lad saw the lights of the brig.

She was all of a mile away, and Pinto knew that it would be a race with the tempest for life.

He had made up his mind to do two good acts. He would escape to the brig-of-war, and thus end his enforced life of piracy, and he would then pilot the vessel out of danger, for he knew the waters perfectly thereabouts, and with the tempest coming in the direction from which it was, he knew, with the island as a mark over the brig's stern, he could hold her on a course that would clear the coral isles, reefs and shoals.

As he stood watching the brig's position before making the leap to swim out to her, he saw a vivid flash of lightning before him.

"Ha! there comes still another tornado. 'This is going to be an awful night, for the two hurricanes must meet each other about here, and I know what that means. Only shelter in this land-locked refuge can save that brig now. But can she be saved? I must dare all to try and save her!'"

He tightened the belt about his waist, drew off his jacket and shoes, and cast them down into the sea.

Then he held a crutch in either hand, with which to check his downward tendency after he should reach the water.

Another instant and the boy officer of the Red Wings made the spring from the cliff of the pirate island to begin his desperate swim out to the brig-of-war, which was doomed if the brave boy could not reach her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

WHEN Pinto arose from his plunge from the cliff, he cast his crutches from him and struck out with strong and quick stroke for the brig.

He could see her lights, so had a beacon by which to hold his course, but from the water she looked a very long distance away.

With the inky clouds coming down ahead of him, and the rapid approach of the tornado from beyond the island, it was enough to appall the stoutest heart; but Pinto was a stranger to fear. His adventurous experiences of the past few years had made him self-reliant in a wonderful degree.

His father had been a splendid swimmer, and when becalmed at sea he would often spring overboard with the boy when he was only six years of age, and thus the lad had learned to defy the sea even.

His powers of endurance in the water had been the admiration and wonder of the Sea Brigands, and on several occasions he had swum around the island on a wager.

No man could equal him in rapid swimming, or in endurance for long distances, and he would dive and remain so long under water that the buccaneers often gave him up as dead, when he would bob up serenely with a laugh at their fears.

But now, he was to take his life in his hands, for the desperate struggle to get to the brig would surely task all his powers.

There was not a breath of air, but the sea was restless before the coming of the resistless tropic tornadoes and tossed about in uneasy waves; but the bold young swimmer had made the venture and though he knew that he could easily round the headland and regain safety for himself, he set his face sternly and nerved himself to go to the brig or perish in the effort to do so.

Then a hundred lives and more were depending upon him alone, though perhaps not one of them dreamed of their danger, he thought, feeling secure in their fine vessel with both anchors down and all ready to meet the coming tempest's onslaught.

Several times the lad turned and looked back toward the island, and was glad to see that he was making good headway.

The choppy sea retarded him, making it slow work to get ahead, but his strokes were steady, untiring and strong and he went along against the great odds.

The brig's lights burned brighter and brighter, and the bold swimmer could see that she too was also feeling the choppy seas and tugging at her anchors.

"If the seas were running strong in one direction they would soon see that her anchors would drag; but, as it is, there is no strain upon them yet," the youth said as he held on his way.

Dimmer and dimmer grew the dark island shores in his rear, while brighter and brighter, like beacons of hope, beamed the brig's light before him.

Two-thirds of the distance had been gone over and yet he kept up his strong and steady strokes, seemingly as untiring as machinery.

Nearer and nearer, until the outlines of the brig's hull became visible, and her rig also, as well as the lights.

The sea was becoming more choppy, and there was but a narrow streak of star-light across the heavens between the clouds rushing toward each other.

Now and then a blinding flash of lightning that bewildered him for a moment would burst out of the masses of jet before him, and coming nearer, sweeping the sea as they came.

Behind him, beyond the island, now was

plainly heard the roar of the tornado, unaccompanied by lightning, but with that ominous glare which the buccaneers were wont to call *El ojo del hurrican*.*

Beyond the island the sea was illumined with this weird glare, the lad knew well, but the shadows of the isle darkened the waters around.

The tempest coming from the other direction was rent by the vivid lightning's fiery serpents oftener and oftener, to be succeeded by the deep boom of thunder that seemed to shake the very sea bodily, and come full voiced, as if to momentarily destroy all sound of the roaring tornado coming on so swiftly and terribly.

Like winged monsters made for destruction the two storms came on, to give battle to each other over the seething sea, and woe unto even a line-of-battle ship if caught between them, the lad well knew.

For a moment, as he realized how utterly helpless the brig would be, he was almost unnerved, and ceased for an instant his untiring strokes; but the weakness was temporary, and he dashed on again with renewed vigor, making each stroke tell.

The brig was now near at hand, and the lad could see that the men were at their posts. It told him the gravity of their situation was recognized by all.

On, on through the chopping seas he went.

He glanced behind him and saw only blackness, and heard the roaring of the now fast-nearing tempest.

As he did so a flash of red flame rent the clouds of the opposing storm, and he beheld, for a second, the island as in the sunlight.

Then he swam on, and while he rose upon the waves he hailed, loud, clear and long:

"Brig ahoy! ahoy! a-h-o-y!"

The air was still as death, only the wash of the waves about the brig, and the fretting chain cables, with the distant roar of the coming hurricane.

The voice came out of the sea and fell upon the ears of officers and men upon the deck as a voice from the spirit land.

Strong men, brave men, racked with superstition gave a groan of absolute fear, believing the voice to be that of a spirit, warning them of doom.

But again came the call out of the sea:

"Ahoy! ahoy the brig! stand by on your starboard quarter to throw me a rope!"

Quickly upon the bulwark leaped a form in uniform and his tones were manly and ringing:

"Who hails from the sea? Whereaway?"

"A pilot! Throw me a rope!" came back the response from the serrated water.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ON CONDITIONS.

It was a decided surprise to the crew of the brig, from the commander down, to see come up by the rope thrown a bare-headed, bare-footed lad of fourteen, with blue sailor shirt, white duck pants and a leather belt heavy with gold as his only clothing.

"Well, young man, who and what are you, to thus board an American man-of-war from the sea?" demanded the commander of the brig, a young man of thirty with the appearance and confidence of a thorough sailor.

He had something of a curious look upon his face as Pinto confronted him.

The lad saluted politely, and replied in his terse, but respectful way:

"I can explain about myself, senor, at another time; but just now your vessel is in danger, as no anchor will hold upon this hard bottom when the storm strikes you."

"Ah! then you have come here to do what you can to save my vessel?"

"Yes, sir, I swam out from the island."

"It is said to be a pirate island."

"It is a retreat, senor, of outlaws and sea brigands."

"And you—"

"I suppose I am an outlaw, too, as my home is there, though not from choice, senor, as I am a captive."

"Then you are the very one to guide us to the pirate haunt."

"Senor, I will pilot your brig to safety, as soon as a breath of wind comes; so please have all ready; but I must ask conditions if I save the vessel."

"Conditions?"

"Yes, senor."

"You demand a price?"

"Not in gold, senor; but, if you capture the retreat, I ask the pardon of one man there, and that you do not execute any one of the people—imprisoning them instead."

"These are strange conditions, young man."

"The buccaneers have been kind to me, senor, and I would not betray them, if I felt that they would be put to death."

"I will pilot the brig into a safe harbor, and then, if you take the retreat, I will not consider myself a traitor; but I ask the freedom of one man, and that you do not put others to death."

"Suppose I force you to be my pilot."

The lad laughed outright, while he said:

*The eye of the hurricane.

"If I had a hundred lives, senor, I would die a hundred times before I would be forced against my will to do what I feel was wrong."

The captain of the brig saw the face of the boy plainly by the light of the battle-lanterns, and something he read there told him that the strange young visitor to his brig would not be driven. So he replied:

"You are a brave lad, I respect your wishes and accept your conditions. If you can save this brig, and I frankly confess that all now depends upon you, when I look about me, I will pledge my commission that you get a middie's berth in the navy, for you will have more than won it."

"Will you take the wheel?" The anchors are leaving the bottom and I feel the current of air ahead of the tempest."

"If it was not for this storm astern, senor, I would have run you through the reefs to open water; but now, I can only take you into the island harbor."

"Then take the wheel, for the brig is in your hands," and the captain was now all anxiety.

"I will go aloft forward, senor, and direct the wheelman from there."

The lad ran forward, sprung into the shrouds and was soon perched up in his position of observation, from which he could see ahead and around.

The storm coming down from astern already made itself felt by puffs of wind, and the brig under only storm-sails began to forge ahead.

The brig's captain stood by the two men at the wheel, while he ordered an officer forward and another amidships to pass the orders from the young pilot, should his voice not be heard in the roar of the storm.

As the brig began to feel the wind that now came in sudden puffs, she would start forward fiercely, for a few lengths, careening well over, and then her sails would flap violently.

The streak of starlight across the heavens, between the two storms, was now very narrow, and the roar of the tempest coming from beyond the island was like the voice of a volcano.

The lightning from the storm coming down astern revealed the jet-black waves of clouds, the foaming sea, the island and the dangerous shoals and surfs upon all sides.

It was the hope of Pinto to rush in before the storm to the harbor and gain an anchorage before the other tempest should strike.

From its looks even in the secure land-locked haven he knew that the winds and waves would be terrible to withstand.

If the storm astern would only strike them first this could be done, but it looked as though it would be a close race between the two aerial giants, a rushing of both to first seize their prey—the American brig-of-war.

Not a soul upon the brig now but realized the full gravity of their situation. They felt that in the boy pilot was their only hope, and that hope seemed slender indeed.

They could understand now that the anchors would never have held upon the hard bottom, even against one storm's force, and that between the two tropic hurricanes, surrounded as they were by reefs, destruction and death would have been certain.

All could see the big black island, the foaming waters as they dashed upon the encircling reef and knew how terrible it would be when the storms came with all their fierceness.

The young captain had been directed to cruise through the Bahamas, landing at all the islands suspected of being the haunts of Sea Brigands.

He had hoped to find a haven for the night on the buccaneer island, and if not, to get an anchorage until morning, when he could pick his way out of the dangerous waters in which he knew his ship to be.

With the storm coming on, he had recalled his boats, and wisely made all shipshape for the tempest, which he saw was bearing down from beyond the island, and this would be allee for him he knew.

But he did not know that where his anchors had dropped there was no holding-place for them.

Then came the other storm before their vision and all realized that, if the brig was saved, it would be a miracle indeed.

CHAPTER XL.

THE YOUNG SKY PILOT.

EVERY eye upon the brig-of-war was turned aloft to where the daring boy pilot clung, his eyes fixed upon the island, in the bosom of which he sought to find safety for the vessel and over a hundred lives.

It was a moment of appalling peril, while the two storms were rushing forward; but the one astern was felt first, and, under the impulse of the advance winds, the stanch brig began to drive forward rapidly. The unloosed wind drove before it a mass of foam which looked like a huge snow wall, and it seemed to many that the brig, stanch as she was, must be crushed down to the depths beneath it.

Fortunately for the vessel she was driving fiercely inward when the full force of the hurricane did strike, and there was for a moment a sinking down, a rushing, roaring of waters, and howling of winds which all seemed to feel

were irresistible; but, loud, shrill rung the voice of the boy aloft:

"Steady at the helm!"

The voice was met with a cheer by the plucky crew, for it told them that the dauntless boy had not lost his calm courage, and was watching the brig with an eye to see and save.

The first shock over, the brig drove frightfully in speed, but the mist of the mountain wave had passed and the next moment came the roar as the wall of waters were hurled against the island with a shock that fairly shook it to its foundation.

On drove the strong vessel, directly for that black wall, and from aloft came the clear boyish voice, distinctly heard above the roar:

"Starboard! Starboard your helm, *hard!*"

The men heard the command and ere it could be repeated by their captain, obeyed.

The brig answered grandly, and then came:

"Steady as you are!"

"Steady it is!" shouted back the captain.

Then quick, sharp and decisive came the command from aloft:

"Hard! hard down your helm and hold her!"

The bows of the brig flew around with frightful velocity until they pointed almost back into the teeth of the tempest, when, commandingly came the order:

"Steady as you are!"

On each side, then, all saw towering above them, and not the brig's length away upon either side, the headland and the point, the gateway into the harbor of the Sea Brigands!

On shot the brig for a few cables length when another order came and rounding the point she ran into the island basin.

The shock of striking the island had hurled back the tempest for a few minutes, as though it was gathering for another rush upon its foe; but, just as the brig shot into the basin the island trembled under the blow of the other tempest as it struck the other shore.

Spray was dashed clear over the island, and rocks, limbs of trees, shells and sands came driving over into the basin and fell upon the decks of the brig.

The two awful wind-bursts, had met over the island and the combat was appalling.

"Let go both anchors," shouted the lad from his perch, and he slid down a rope to the deck, his duty done.

The anchors were let fall quickly; the sails set were torn from their hold before they could be taken in, and the brig rocked violently under the wild seas driven into the basin, and the whirling winds above.

It was still a moment of suspense to all, for no one in the vessel had seen such a combat of tempest before, and the men crouched down in dread, all knowing that the end was not yet.

And thus for over an hour raged the fearful conflict of the tempests, and though the anchors held firm in the harbor there, all knew that death would have come quickly and sure to them had the brig been out of that secure retreat.

Worn out at last, Pinto had gone below and turned in, at the urgent request of the captain in his cabin.

His anxiety of the past few weeks to make his escape, his long swim, and then the strain upon his nerves in saving the brig had completely prostrated him and he slept like one in a trance.

When he at last awoke it was nearly noon of the day following the storm and he beheld the handsome captain of the brig bending over him.

He looked bewildered for awhile and then cried:

"I saved the brig, did I not, senor?"

"You did indeed, my noble lad, and in masterly style, too."

"Every man on board this vessel owes you his life and realizes it as well as I do."

"I am glad I did my duty, senor; but it is daylight."

"Yes, you have slept from midnight until noon, and becoming anxious about you I determined to see what was the matter."

"Oh, senor, the buccaneers?"

"Are my prisoners, one and all, I guess, for I have nearly half a hundred, all told."

"They surrendered, senor, without a fight?"

"We landed before dawn, for the storm blew over after midnight, and surprised them in their quarters, so no resistance was offered."

"And what do they think of me, senor, for they call me a traitor?"

"They know not you were my pilot, and there is no need for them to know it if you prefer. I have them all prisoners on board the schooner I found here in the harbor, as also their boats, and have a prize crew in charge which sails at once for New Orleans."

"And Captain Santo?"

"Who is he?"

"The one I wished to have you set free, senor."

"I shall do as I promised, my lad, so will send for the man."

This was done and the messenger returned with the response that Miguel Santo could not be found.

The last seen of him, some of the Sea Brigands had said, was when he boarded the schooner during the tempest with a boat's crew, fearing she would go adrift and have to be run out to be saved.

Neither Captain Santo nor any of the crew with him had been seen since, and it was supposed that they had been lost, for several boats upturned and crushed were found upon the harbor shores.

A thorough search failed to find Santo or his men, and so Pinto was compelled to believe that he and the twelve buccaneers who accompanied him were lost in the storm.

The brig sailed away, her captain and crew more than happy at their escape, and satisfied with their capture of the Sea Brigands' island retreat and their schooner as a prize.

And with the brig sailed Pinto, the boy captive of the buccaneers.

CHAPTER XLI.

SANTO'S LUCK.

SANTO, the Island Captain, was an experienced sailor, and he soon realized that the storm was to be no common one.

He saw the other storm also coming up, and he feared for the schooner in the harbor should both meet there.

If the harbor became too wild, he knew he could scud out with the schooner and run for open water some leagues beyond, returning after the gale had blown itself out, if, as a last alternative he had to do this.

But by being on board the schooner he knew that he could, under storm stay-sails, beat up and down the little harbor and thus save the craft, as he feared she might part her cables if left at anchor.

So he first went up to the quarters of the chief to tell Pinto what he meant to do, and to his surprise found the lad gone.

He supposed he was out looking at the coming storms, or at some of the cabins, and so Santo went from place to place, picking his men to go on board of the schooner with him and also to find Pinto.

But the lad he did not of course find, though he secured the twelve men whom he wished to aid him in the schooner.

On board this vessel was the principal booty belonging to the buccaneers, and the treasure left by Captain Kent upon his last visit.

Santo knew that the craft would stand any weather, if forced to leave the harbor, which with two storms raging, he feared would be the case.

So they went down to the coast, and selecting the largest of the boats, they shoved off.

"I'll take a look first at the brig, lads, for we can get the schooner under way, if we have to, in a few minutes," said Santo, and he headed for the pass out to sea.

The scene was a terrible one, as they beheld it, once they had run out into open water, and they sat in their tossing-boat, oars at rest, gazing about them.

"This is the worst night I ever experienced in all my sea life," said Santo, and every man of the twelve in the boat with him agreed that he was right.

Suddenly Santo uttered a cry of alarm, and pointing toward the brig, called out:

"She is under sail, and coming directly for the harbor."

"She has a pilot on board, men, and we are lost!"

All realized that the brig was running for the harbor, and she came on in a way that showed she had a pilot on board, that was certain.

To regain the shore and give the alarm even would be impossible, and to get the people to the battery and the headland was not to be thought of for a minute.

There was but one thing they could do, and that was to look out for themselves.

"Give way hard, men, for the storm is coming, too, and we'll pull to a landing."

"But we can never reach it," cried several voices.

"We can reach a landing I know of, and a hiding-place, too, it will be for us!"

"Pull for your lives, men!"

The crew needed no second bidding, and the eight men at the oars sent the boat flying over the choppy seas.

Straight into the pass Santo guided her, to suddenly put his helm hard down and run up toward the headland.

"Way 'nough!"

The order was obeyed, and then came the commands to "back water" and "stand by to leave the boat."

She glided alongside of a reef, and instantly Santo sprung out, followed by the men.

"Lads, it will be hard work, but we must save the boat, and to do it we have to carry it around the headland in this reef to the outer shore where I know a hiding place for it and ourselves."

"Fortunately we brought provisions and water with us to take aboard the schooner."

"Now, out with the oars, mast, sails and tiller to lighten her!"

This was done and the men carried them along the reef until they rounded the headland.

Then all went back for the boat and it was bodily lifted to the shoulders of the thirteen men.

As they reached the spot where the oars had been left they beheld the brig driving on to

round the headland and not three cables' length away.

But the tempest was upon them too, and they had barely time to rush up around the breaks in the wall with the boat and crouch down for safety when the tempest struck.

Sailors, buccaneers and superstitious as they were, they were in dread alarm that Retribution had come upon them at last.

The island seemed to rock under the force of the tempest and then to tremble when the second one thundered away upon its coast.

For several hours the frightened men crouched there, drenched with the spray and fearing death.

But at last the storm clouds parted and scattered, the fierce winds swept on and the huge waves became each moment less violent.

Then Santo sallied forth to seek the hiding-place he had in mind.

The men went with him and found it a break in the coast of the island, which, to reach, one could only come the way they had, and as to land upon the headland from a boat was the only means of getting there they felt that they were secure.

Then they brought the boat there and it was just before dawn they threw themselves down to rest, for to give warning to their comrades up on the island was impossible.

They beheld the brig drive like mad past the headland, round it in a masterly way, and sweep on into the harbor, and they knew that some pilot who knew the harbor well, and possessed uncommon nerve was at the helm.

Who that pilot was they did not know, could not guess, but Santo said:

"Mates, I did not believe that other man than Captain Kent and myself could bring a vessel into this harbor as that brig came."

"Unless it is the lad," said one of the men.

"Pinto?"

"Yes, senor."

"Yes, he could do it, for he knows these waters better than any of us, I admit; but who did do it I cannot even guess."

"Perhaps it was the chief in a new vessel, and trying to fool us by dropping anchor off there this afternoon," said one, and all started at the suggestion.

"Perhaps it was, but yet no, it could not have been," Santo said thoughtfully.

It was sunrise when they awoke and Santo crept out to reconnoiter.

He saw the brig at anchor in the harbor and read the situation at a glance, so returned to his comrades, and all remained in suspense until later in the day they beheld the vessel-of-war stand out to sea, the prize schooner following in her wake.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE RETURN.

THE buccaneers watched the brig disappear with feelings of delight, congratulating themselves upon their own escape, whatever the fate might be of their comrades.

They looked at the yard-arm of the brig like men who expected to see dangling there human forms.

Until the brig was nearly hulled down they dared not leave their place of concealment, feeling sure that glasses were upon the island to see if any one had escaped the cruiser's crew.

At last they came out of their hiding-place and following the reef around stood gazing toward the landing.

Not a moment had they stood there when they were startled by seeing several forms.

At first they feared the brig had left there some of their crew to catch any buccaneers who had been in hiding intending to return for them; but a second glance showed that they were some of the buccaneers.

Santo hailed loudly and it startled the others visibly.

But they too recognized their comrades, and one came along the headland ridge when he was hailed by Santo and told to bring a boat.

One boat was found in not too bad repair and it was rowed out to the ledge, when the Island Captain and his men embarked for the landing, determined to leave their boat in its hiding-place, at least for the present.

Then Santo heard the story of the landing of the brig's crew and captain of the buccaneers, only five of those in the cabins being able to make their escape.

"But did they not search the island, Benito?" asked the Island Captain.

"Oh, yes, senor, thoroughly; but I have a hiding-place I discovered, and I took my mates there."

"And you five are all who escaped, Benito?"

"Yes, senor, excepting you and your dozen comrades."

Santo then told how they had escaped, and added:

"Now I would give much to know who was the brig's pilot into the harbor?"

"Why, don't you know, senor?"

"I certainly do not."

"It was that young traitor, the chief's pet."

"You do not mean Senor Pinto?"

"I do."

"Impossible!"

"It is true, senor."

"Why he was on crutches, and—"

"Not so lame as you supposed, senor."

"But how did he get out to the brig?"

"I suppose he swam out, for he's just the boy to do it."

"I believe you are right, and yet I cannot feel that Pinto was a traitor."

"I saw him, senor, from the hill yonder, for you see I have my glass."

"You saw him?"

"I did, senor, I saw him on the deck of the brig acting as her pilot out to sea."

"Well, I can doubt no longer; but did the Americans get anything?"

"They failed to get our stores, senor, in the coral cave, but the schooner, booty and our people, all excepting ourselves, they got."

"Well, senor, there is but one thing for us to do."

"Yes, senor."

"We must await the coming of the chief and then go upon the Red Wings."

"It is all we can do, Senor Captain, until the chief establishes another retreat, when I hope he will make you Island Captain again, for we can all testify that it was not your fault, the capture of the stronghold."

"No, I do not consider that I am to blame, Benito; but we can only now seek shelter for the night and to-morrow build up quarters again, for I see that they have burned everything."

"Yes, senor, they made a clean sweep of it," answered Benito.

The buccaneers now sought the coral cave in the shore, where they kept their ship's stores, and soon had a good supper cooking, after which, tired out with all they had passed through, they threw themselves down to sleep, for night was coming on.

The dawn came and Santo strolled up to the hilltop for a look over the sea.

One glance was sufficient to drive all the color from his face, and send him at a run down to where his comrades were, some of them still sleeping.

"Quick, men, the American brig is returning so we must have things look as they left them."

"The brig returning?" was the startled cry of the buccaneers.

"Yes, and some of you get down to the shore and put the boat as it was, while others scatter the traces of our last night's supper."

The men hastened away to obey the order while Benito asked:

"How far off is the brig, senor?"

"Two leagues yet, but the wind is fair and she is heading straight for the island, and within two hours will drop anchor here."

"Now, Benito, where is your hiding place?"

"I will take you to it in good time, senor."

"Is there any fear of it being discovered?"

"Not the slightest, senor, for to reach it we must climb a tree and step off upon a ledge, and here is a cavern large enough for all of us."

"Good! we will go there when all the men are ready, and it is lucky for us we can, Benito, for we could not reach my hiding-place now without being seen from the brig's deck."

"Senor Santo?"

"Well?"

"If the brig comes it is for a purpose?"

"Yes, but what can be the purpose?"

"Perhaps Pinto the lad has told that some of us must still be upon the island."

"It may be, but he does not know your hiding-place?"

"No, senor; but it may be that he has told how the brig is expected back soon and the brig returns to wait for him."

"Whew! that must be it, Benito."

"Then, senor, if we have to remain in hiding for some time, perhaps weeks, it will be well to take provisions there with us, and water."

"Good, Benito! you are a jewel, and I leave it to you to get the provisions from the cave, while I with some of the men fill water-casks to carry with us."

All was at once excited action among the buccaneers, for water-casks were taken to the springs, borne upon poles swung upon the shoulders of four men. Some filled the casks, others carried them to the tree which had to be scaled to reach the hiding place, and others drew them up with ropes and stowed them away.

Provisions were brought too, also weapons and ammunition from the same store-house, or cave, rather, and when the last man, Santo, had climbed up to the retreat, Benito, who was perched up in the tree, reported that the brig was entering the harbor of the buccaneer island.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE REWARD OF DARING.

THE brig-of-war Restless was the one that had so nearly met her doom in the Bahamas, and had captured the buccaneer island of Captain Kent.

Her commander, Clifford Carr was one of the most dashing young officers of the navy, and had won fame for himself and vessel upon a number of occasions.

He was homeward bound when he had

orders to run through the Bahamas searching for sea outlaws.

After his successful blow at the buccaneers upon Kent's island stronghold, the brig had stood seaward, as has been seen, with the prize schooner in her wake.

Pinto had been the pilot of the brig, and having run through the shoals, reefs and isles to open water, winning the admiration of the commander and crew thereby, he turned to Captain Clifford Carr and said:

"I would like to report for duty, sir, if you wish."

"Well, what other duty can you perform, my lad?" was the smiling response.

"I have done duty before the mast, sir, and as an officer, though upon a private craft."

"You have not told me your name yet, my lad?"

"I have almost forgotten my real name, sir, as I have been called Pinto by the buccaneers for so long a time; but my name is Claude Cassiday."

"Claude Cassiday?"

"Why that is the name of a gallant officer of the navy, who received his commission from the merchant service for having saved a brig-of-war right here in the Bahamas, or rather her crew, for she went down."

"It must have been my father, sir, for I was named after him, and he commanded a West Indian trading schooner, and I was lost from the vessel right here in the Bahamas over three years ago, I believe it was."

"Now I recall it, Lieutenant Cassiday did lose a son in some mysterious way."

"I met your father, as I am now sure it was, when in Havana, and he was an officer on board the Emerald sloop-of-war, and a splendid looking man he was too."

"It must have been my father, sir, for I came upon the graves of a cutter's crew commanded by him, sent out from the Emerald, and he was the sole survivor."

"Yes, I remember hearing of it, and it was sad indeed to have him meet the fate he afterward did in Mexico at the hands of Mexican bandits, after all he had passed through."

"My father is dead, sir?" said Claude in a startled way.

"Alas, yes, my poor boy; but I had forgotten that you could hardly know the fact."

"I will tell you all of the sad circumstances, as I had the story from several brother officers," and while Claude Cassiday leaned over the taffrail, gazing down into the wake of the brig as she sped along through the blue waters, Captain Clifford Carr told the story of his father's death in Mexico, and how nobly Lieutenant Hartwell, a brother officer had stood by him while dying, and then saved him from the cruel Mexicans.

Little Claude listened with deep emotion, now and then asking a question, and then he said:

"I am needed at home, more than my thought, for my mother and sister have not my father to care for them now."

"You are a brave boy, Claude, and will make your mark yet."

"Your father won his commission by saving the crew of Hartwell's brig, at the risk of his own vessel and men, and you have saved my brig and our lives by most desperate, splendid pluck that has never been surpassed, and I have told you that you shall have a midshipman's berth for your noble services, for gold you indignantly refused."

"Yes, sir, I would not take pay in gold for saving a life, but I would be glad of a commission, ever so glad, if you think I have deserved it."

"You have more than done so and every officer and man, from myself to the cabin-boys will go upon the plea for the appointment for you, which I shall present in person to the President."

"Through you this brig has been saved, one hundred and fifteen lives, a fine schooner has been taken, with many thousand dollars in booty, while a band of buccaneers have been captured, and a severe blow dealt piracy in these waters."

"I shall be happy to be a middy, sir, if I can get to be one after having been a pirate."

"You a pirate?"

"Yes, sir, I guess I've been a pretty wicked pirate, as I now see myself."

Captain Clifford burst into laughter at the

solemn manner in which Claude spoke, and said:

"Well, my wicked young pirate friend, the President will doubtless pardon your manifold sins and wickedness, seeing that you were forced into piracy and made efforts to escape as soon as you could do so, while I do not suppose you have been a desperate cutter of throats."

"No, sir, I have fought in Captain Kent's attacks upon Spanish, French and English vessels, but he would never fire upon an American cruiser."

"I have heard this of him; but, what kind of a man was he, Claude?"

"A stern man, sir, to all but me, and to me he was as kind as he could be and pardoned me for all I did," and Claude told the story of his rescuing Captain Harold and then his escape through Santo.

"I can now understand why you wished this Santo spared, Claude; but, if you find this Captain Harold I'll help you to get revenge upon him."

"A merchant captain you say he was?"

"That was his schooner, sir, and is all I know about him, except that I am sure he came here to hunt for treasure buried upon some of the islands."

"Well, I hope he never found it, and that some day you will cross his path again; but, now, where is Kent the Buccaneer?"

"Off on a cruise, sir."

"Is he expected back soon?"

"I was looking for him any day, Captain Clifford."

The captain started, glanced at Claude and then around upon the sea.

"What water have we here, Claude?"

"All of twenty fathoms, sir."

It was now growing dark, and after a moment of meditation Captain Clifford said:

"We will run back, Claude, to the first reefs and drop anchor for the night."

"Run back, sir?"

"Yes, and at dawn stand in again to the island harbor, and I shall have to ask you once more to be my pilot."

"Certainly, sir, if you wish to return."

"I do very much, and I shall put you on a pilot's pay while on board the brig."

"I brought money with me, sir, in my belt, so I do not wish any pay."

"You did manage to save a little of your pay, then, as a private officer, Claude?" said Captain Carr, jokingly.

"Yes, sir, I've got some gold and jewels, in all several thousand dollars," was the innocent reply.

"Well, Claude, as I intend to have you a midshipman, I shall break you into your duties now, so we'll go enter you upon the books, and the ship's tailor will rig you up in a uniform."

"You are very kind to me, Captain Carr."

"No more than you deserve; but until we are away from the Bahamas you must be our pilot," and Captain Carr called his officers up and presented to them Acting Midshipman Claude Cassiday.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A SHIP IN AMBUSH.

By one of those accidents which often occur, when a bright mind will fail to grasp an idea at once, Claude Cassiday failed to see a reason for Captain Clifford Carr putting back to the island of the buccaneers.

He ran the brig back to the dangerous cruising ground about the island, and then the captain ordered the anchor let fall, though Claude told him he could go in by night.

"No, we will go in the morning," was the response, and at dawn Claude was called to again act as pilot.

He headed the brig through her intricate course, after Captain Carr had given orders for the prize schooner to follow, for the commander of that vessel kept constantly astern of the cruiser.

Into the harbor he ran the brig, and Captain Carr sought a position which would completely command the entrance to the basin, after a vessel had once rounded the point.

Here he anchored the brig fore and aft, her broadside bearing upon the pass, while the schooner was run close inshore behind her.

As the tall topmasts of the brig were visible over the headland, the order was at once

given to house them, and at once it came upon the lad why Captain Carr had run back to the island, and he said:

"You intend to await the coming of Captain Kent, sir?"

"Yes, Claude, I did not say as much to you, as I knew you were at least kindly disposed to the buccaneer chief and would not willingly wish to capture him by act of yours."

"So I got you to run the brig back again, and here we will remain in ambush, as our soldier comrades say, until the buccaneer chief runs his head into the yard-arm noose."

"For Captain Kent's sake, sir, I hope he will not come, though I think that he will; but for the sake of clearing the seas of outlaws it will be the best to have his career ended," Claude said.

A boat was now sent ashore and a lookout posted to report the coming of the buccaneer vessel, and then the men were allowed a run upon the land and went into camp there, signals for their recall being agreed upon when needed during the day.

But at night they were to be all aboard ship.

Claude strolled over the island with Captain Carr, showing him points of interest, and the officers and men greatly enjoyed the stay ashore, after having been so long cramped up on board ship.

Thus several days passed away and no sail came in sight, while it may well be imagined by the reader that Santo and his buccaneers in hiding were made very wretched by the presence on the island of the crew of the brig.

They could see, from their hiding place, the American sailors roaming about, and hear their jests about capturing and hanging Captain Kent and his men.

Santo was nearly crazed by the situation, for he knew the utter impossibility of his being able to give his chief warning of the danger that threatened.

"He will run in and meet a broadside of the brig as his first warning, and before he can put about the boats will board and carry him," said the Island Captain.

But not one of the men, even the quick-witted Benito, could suggest any way of warning the chief.

It would be impossible to get to the shore, if they could find a boat in which to run out.

Then if they could get to sea where could they find the schooner, which was just as likely to come from one side of the island as the other.

"The chief, I fear, will have to take his chances, and he is a man to extricate himself from almost any danger, as we all know," said Santo.

"If we could only reach the headland, and when seeing the schooner coming dare do what Pinto has done, spring into the sea and swim off several miles, we might warn the chief," Benito said.

"Yes, but that boy was half fish, for he swam as I never knew any man to do," growled the Island Captain.

As they could divine no plan to warn the chief, the buccaneers could only remain in biding to save themselves from a fate equally as bad as the one threatening Captain Kent.

The water in the casks was warm, they could cook no food and they were cramped in their quarters; but still they were willing to suffer to save their necks and only wished that the schooner would soon come and the suspense be over, for they were not so sure that they would not be found yet.

If the chief came, then if captured the brig with her prizes would sail away.

If they did not capture the schooner they would go away in chase, and in either case have the field open to their escape.

And they must make their escape from the island in a small boat, though dangerous it was, and where to go they knew not.

Their situation was truly an unfortunate one for them.

Thus the days passed until the brig had been at anchor in the buccaneer harbor for nearly two weeks.

The men were enjoying their run ashore, though anxious for the coming of the buccaneer.

As for Claude Cassiday he felt the situation more than any one else. He had not in-

tended to be treacherous, and yet he felt that he was placed in that light before the buccaneers.

The more he knew of his brother officers on the brig, the more he realized, now that he was older, how heinous was the crime of piracy, and he felt that he would be glad to have the schooner come and the suspense be over.

For Captain Kent and others in the schooner he felt deep pity, and he found himself hoping that when he had brought affairs about as they then were, the chief would be able to make his escape, by one of his daring acts for which he was famous, and then, afterward, the schooner could be taken without his, Claude's, aid.

One afternoon the lookout on the island hailed the officer on the brig's deck:

"Sail ho!"

"Ay, ay! Do you make her out?"

"A schooner, sir, coming with a fair breeze directly for the island."

"Ay, ay! Report any change," ordered the officer, and the signal was at once given to call the crew aboard.

They were not long in coming. Supper was served, and the men went to their guns, while all was made ready for the combat that all now knew was not far off, as the lookout had come aboard and reported the schooner not a mile away.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE SURPRISE.

CLAUDE CASSIDAY stood upon the deck of the brig-of-war Restless, awaiting the coming in of the vessel on which he had held an officer's berth, young as he was.

He had been on the deck of the Red Wings in many a hard combat, had seen her weather many a terrific gale, and felt a strong attachment for the beautiful vessel.

He had taken his stand to do his duty, when Captain Carr, in the kindness of his heart, walked up to him and said:

"Claude, you are relieved from duty, if you wish, for to-night."

Claude knew that Captain Kent was coming to the rendezvous for him, as he had promised to do, hoping the youth's wound would permit him to go to sea again when he arrived.

The boy did not see behind the scenes, into the heart of the pirate chief what had prompted his kindness to him.

But, in response to Captain Carr, he said:

"I am on duty, sir, this watch, and shall not leave my post, for I know I am doing right though striking at the heart of those who have been my friends."

"You are right, Cassiday, to do your duty as you see it," and with this the captain turned away.

As has been said, the brig was anchored fore and aft, to present her broadside to the entrance to the snug harbor, and yet she could slip her cables and stand away in pursuit in a minute of time did the sea brigand's schooner wear around in flight.

"We will fire, Mr. Carncross, when you see her lights open fair," were Captain Carr's orders to his first officer.

"Ay, ay, sir; all ready," was the prompt response.

"Pardon me, Captain Carr, but the Red Wings shows no lights except when needed, and she will run in without them," said Claude, politely saluting.

"Mr. Cassiday, is that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then fire when you see her distinctly, Mr. Carncross."

"Ay, ay, Captain Carr."

Then all was silence upon the brig, and every man was ready and waiting.

The minutes passed slowly until a low voice said:

"There she is, sir!"

"Where?"

It was Claude who spoke, and Lieutenant Carncross asked the question, for the lad's eyes had seen the schooner first, knowing just where to look for her appearance.

"There, sir—"

"Ah! I see her now. Ready at your guns!" came the low order of the officer.

All was darkness upon the brig, the port-fires being held out of sight, and now every eye was upon the schooner gliding into the trap set for her by her ambushed foe.

She came on, slowly, losing much of the

wind as she ran in under the lee of the island, yet still holding a five-knot speed under her mainsail, foresail and jib, for she was lowering away topsails.

A moment more and the order rung out in a voice not to be mistaken:

"Starboard battery! *fire!*"

The brig reeled under the discharge of her ten broadside guns and a pivot mounted fore and aft, and the cracking of timbers, mingled with shrieks, curses and stern commands, at once followed.

It was a complete surprise to the Sea Brigands' chief, while the flash of the guns had revealed to him a large vessel, and a second one indistinctly seen beyond.

He knew that he was in a trap, but he was not a man to yield without desperate efforts to escape.

Unmindful of his own guns then, his voice rung loud in his orders to prepare to go about.

The broadside had cut through his sails, severed the rigging, crashed through the bulwarks, dismounting a couple of guns, and strewing the deck with dead and wounded.

Every man knew his danger, and that hitting back would not save them then, but flight alone, so all men started to obey. The schooner would have gone about at once had she not been in the pass, but she had to go ahead fully a couple of lengths to get room to go about in, and once more came the loud command:

"Starboard guns, ready! *Fire!*"

This time the guns were loaded with grape and canister for short range.

Captain Carr did not wish to cripple the schooner too badly, but have his fire tell upon the crew.

And the fire did tell, for the Sea Brigands were fairly mowed down by this terrible rain of shot.

Unhurt in the midst of the hail of iron, Captain Kent's ringing voice was heard telling his men to go to their posts, and the schooner still stood on until Captain Carr called out:

"Boarders to repel boarders!"

"He is only running in, sir, far enough to get room to go about," said Claude, for the brig's captain stood near the lad, as though the boy knew all the pirate meant to do.

"I guess you are right, Cassiday. Another broadside, Mr. Carncross, and then fire at will."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said the cool deep voice of the lieutenant, and once more followed the order:

"Ready starboard guns—*fire!*"

The schooner was just going about when this third terrific broadside was poured upon her.

The two men at the wheel fell dead, but instantly did Captain Kent spring to it.

He was too late, for the schooner had lost her headway, and he could see that the surviving men were crazed with fear now.

In vain he tried to rally them, for the fire of the brig's guns began now, firing singly, and every shot seemed to tell.

With loud cries the men began to spring into the sea, while wild cheers rose from the crew of the Restless and a stern voice ordered:

"Boats away! Man the boats, lads, and carry her by boarding!"

It was Captain Carr who gave the order, and the men quickly crowded into the boats.

"Board with me, Cassiday," said Captain Carr, as Claude was going over the side.

The lad saluted and obeyed and the first boat pulled away, a twelve-oared barge.

It was the captain's boat, and as it shot out under the line of fire from the guns, the brig's battery ceased firing.

The first and second cutters, filled with men, followed the barge and the pull of a thousand feet to the schooner was quickly made.

The Sea Brigands' craft had drifted further into the harbor, and was broadside to them now, but no shot came from them, no voice bailed to say that the vessel had yielded.

"Way 'nough!" cried Captain Carr, and then an order to the coxswain brought the barge alongside and a grapnel was thrown.

"Boarders follow me!"

With the command, cutlass in hand the captain leaped upon the deck of the buc-

caner, and by his side was Claude Cassiday.

What a sight met the eyes of the victorious American—a sight that made even men used to scenes of carnage turn pale and heart-sick, for the deck of the beautiful Red Wings, from taffrail to bowsprit was strewn with the dead and dying brigands.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A FAVOR ASKED.

THE first command given by Captain Carr after reaching the deck of the buccaneer schooner was to run her at once to an anchorage inshore, and the second to look after the wounded.

There were unwounded men there who surrendered by throwing down their weapons, but they were just then unheeded in the desire to get the schooner anchored and the wounded cared for.

"Where is your chief?" asked Captain Carr of a pirate officer who stood on the quarter-deck, his arms folded, as he calmly surveyed the scene.

"Drowned, senor, I suppose, for he preferred that mode of death to hanging, and he was desperately wounded when he sprung into the water."

"And do you command here now, in his stead?"

"It seems that *you* do, senor," was the reply.

"And you?"

"Was a pirate officer, senor, so if you wish me to surrender you the beautiful Red Wings I will do so, though if you desire to have her black flag hauled down you must do it yourself."

"Haul down her flag, Cassiday," commanded the captain, and Claude obeyed.

"Now, sir, you are my prisoner," and Captain Carr turned to the young pirate officer, who was now leaning heavily upon the bulwarks.

"Not your prisoner, senor, but Death's, for I have my death-wound—see!"

He opened his jacket as he spoke, and showed that a bullet had pierced his breast. He was literally dying upon his feet!

"My poor fellow, I will have my surgeon come to your aid," said Captain Carr, struck with the nerve of the young pirate officer.

"Thank you, senor, but it is too late, and why save my life now to end it on the gallows in the near future? No, I am dying, Senor Captain."

And then came a sudden, awful proof of his words, for he stretched forth his hands, as though to grasp at something visible, and with a low cry fell dead upon the ensanguined decks.

"A brave fellow that, Cassiday."

"Yes, sir; it was Officer Brule, and one of the best men on the schooner; but he said that Captain Kent was seriously wounded and had gone overboard?"

"Yes, doubtless preferring to die thus. But, come with me into the cabin."

The beautiful cabin of the schooner had also witnessed the horrors of the combat, for a private officer and several men lay dead there, while one man was alive, but severely wounded.

"Where is your chief, my man?" asked Captain Carr.

"He was covered with wounds, sir, and sprung into the sea to drown, and I regret I was unable to follow him."

"I guess Captain Kent has cheated the gallows, Cassiday," remarked Clifford Carr as he gazed about him with admiration at the exquisite beauty of the cabin of the Red Wings.

The schooner had now come to anchor. Battle lanterns illumined the deck and the crew of the Restless were at once set to work to care for the wounded—the score of unharmed Sea Brigands standing sullenly amidships awaiting their doom in silence whatever it should be.

The wounded cared for, and they were many, the dead were consigned to the deep and the prisoners, heavily ironed, were sent on board the little prize schooner.

Then a prize officer and crew were ordered on board the Red Wings, upon which repairs at once began, for having captured his game Captain Carr was anxious to set sail with the greatest dispatch for home.

Soon after sunset the Red Wings was ready for sea again, and the three vessels

sailed out of the pirate harbor, the brig leading the way and with Claude Cassiday again acting as pilot.

The Red Wings followed close in her wake, while the little prize schooner, with all the prisoners and wounded on board, brought up the rear.

Just before the hour set for sailing, Captain Carr was visited in his cabin by Claude Cassiday.

"Well, Claude, what is it, my lad?"

"Captain Cassiday, I have a favor to ask of you, sir?"

"Well, out with it, Claude."

"When the brig was in danger, sir, of being lost, I made certain conditions with you?"

"Yes, I remember."

"The man whose life I asked, you may recall, was lost last night going out to the prize schooner with others in a boat?"

"So the buccaneers reported."

"Now, captain, there is one man of the crew whom I wish you would give his pardon in the place of the one for whom I asked it. He has ever been most kind to me, treated me as a father might a son, and he is not at heart a bad man I feel sure, while what drove him to a life of piracy we cannot tell, sir."

"He is willing to accept his life and remain here upon this island, living the life of a hermit, if you will permit it, and I beg of you to allow him to do so, Captain Carr, for my sake, and I shall ask no other favor."

"Can it be done without the others knowing of the affair?"

"Yes, captain. He is wounded, and was not removed on board the prize schooner with the others, and they believe his wound fatal."

"Is it so severe?"

"Apparently so, sir, but in reality not so serious, for the bullet glanced upon a rib and did not enter his body."

"I grant the favor you ask, Cassiday, but may the man not die alone on the island?"

"I think not, sir, for it is fertile and well planted, as you have seen, and he is ingenious, and can make him a boat from material here, if he tires of his hermit life."

"Bring him on deck, then, Cassiday, and you can row him ashore in the gig yourself, for it will be supposed that you go aboard one of the prizes."

"I thank you sincerely, Captain Carr, for this kindness, sir."

"It is through you, Cassiday, that all my triumph was gained, and a life more or less seems little to grant, especially as the secret being between you and me, I will not be held accountable for the man you speak of."

"Again I thank you, sir," said Claude, and he went below decks for the wounded pirate.

"Come with me," said the lad, quietly.

"Whither?"

"It matters not. Come."

The prisoner obeyed, and, five minutes after, in the darkness, the little gig touched the shore.

"Now you are free, for I asked Captain Carr's permission to save the life of one who had ever been kind to me."

"We sail within an hour, and my path in life will be one of honor, and Heaven grant, senor, yours be different from the past."

"This letter will explain that which will surprise you. I was no traitor to the buccaneers, for I never was at heart a pirate, as you must have seen—only a captive. *Adios, senor.*"

The man uttered some words, but the lad did not heed them, and dropping his oars into the water, rowed rapidly away in the darkness.

Soon after he ran alongside the brig, coming from the direction of the Red Wings, and an hour after the brig-of-war was standing out to sea with the young pilot directing her course.

"You left your man to play the hermit ashore, Claude?" asked Captain Carr who stood near.

"Yes, captain."

"I am glad of it, for I am sincerely pleased to have served you, Claude," was the response of the brig's commander who felt strongly drawn toward this handsome boy who so long had been compelled to consort with sea brigands and to serve under a black flag.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE HERMIT.

THE one whom Claude Cassiday had aided to escape, or rather gained permission to live the life of a hermit upon the buccaneers' island, stood where he had been left by the lad, gazing in silence after the receding boat.

"I cannot blame him," he muttered at last. "Had he been younger when found he would have known no other life; but, he was a precocious lad, and already well comprehended the sin of piracy. His parents had taught him well, and, boy though he is, he has clung to his early training."

"He has never been one of us, though he has never neglected a duty assigned to him. He did not turn traitor, for he was never one of us."

"And he has given me this letter. Tomorrow I will know what it says. Now I will seek rest."

"This wound is slight, but it served my purpose well, and will soon be healed, I think."

So saying, he moved up the hill from the landing, sought a place where he could lie down, using his bundle of clothing and provisions given him by the lad as a pillow.

The sound of the boatswain's whistle aroused him, and he saw the vessels getting under way and watched them sail out of the harbor with a strange feeling creeping upon him.

"There goes my beautiful Red Wings, the prize of my foes, though I have never turned the muzzle of a gun upon Americans, savagely though they have hunted me."

"And the gallant fellow who has made the capture is my old shipmate, Cliff Carr?"

"Well, sooner that he should be the Brigands' destroyer than any other, for he was always friendly toward me I remember in the olden time."

"He is a noble fellow and a perfect sailor; but how did he find the lad? that is the question that worries me."

The ships stood out to sea and the pirate again sought rest.

The sunlight piercing the foliage and falling in his face awakened him.

He felt refreshed and took a plunge into the sea, after which he said:

"Now, I feel like a new man, if I am all alone on this island."

He glanced seaward when he came back upon the hill and saw the three sail now leagues away.

"Now to this letter," and he took from his pocket the letter handed to him by Claude. It was not dated and he read it aloud as follows:

"MY DEAR SENOR:—

"I write this letter that you may understand my situation and bear toward me no malice."

"I saw the brig anchor off the island, and knew that in the tempest rising she would be lost; so I swam out to her, intending to pilot her away from here; but with two storms rushing upon her, I was forced to bring her into the island harbor."

"The people were captured, and I was given a berth upon the brig by Captain Carr."

"We sailed then, but the captain took a notion to return and await your coming, and his purpose I did not guess until he prepared to surprise you."

"You know the result, and that I recognized you on the deck at once, and told you I would save you."

"I have done my duty, for I asked Captain Carr to spare one who had been most kind to me—one who would remain here upon the island as a hermit."

"I thus saved you, and as you have your belt of valuables with you, I am glad to feel that you will not be destitute, and I hope may lead a different life, as you are well fitted to do."

"That I was not a traitor to the band, let me tell you that Santo and others are now in hiding upon the island."

"I heard their voices the other night, discovered where they were, and of course did not betray them."

"The large sea barge is missing, and I know where Santo has it in hiding, and it will carry you all from here to some port."

"When the vessels are out of sight, then look up Santo, and you will find all as I have said."

"I did not tell where the stores were hidden, so you have ample provisions."

"I feel that I have done my duty in going with the brig, for there are those dear to me to whom I go, and if I have seemed treacherous toward you and your people, I was not intentionally so."

"Now let me bid you farewell, with the hope that, from to-day, your life may no longer be that of a pirate."

CLAUDE CASSIDAY."

In a boyish hand, though correctly spelled, this letter was written, and Captain Kent read it through carefully.

His lip quivered as he did so, and he seemed deeply moved; but, subduing all feeling, he arose and said:

"So I will find Santo and others upon the island?"

"Good! There may yet be a chance for me, as the boy says the sea barge is hidden away here also."

"Yes, there may yet be a chance for me to soon stand upon another deck, for piracy is the only career open to me."

"I am not crushed by reverses, and those who deem that I am swept from the seas, will find another Red Wings afloat before very long!"

"I have a fortune here," and he patted his leather belt, heavy with gold and jewels.

"I must get another vessel; and more—I must get that boy again in my power, for he has a future of honor and fame before him, *if I do not prevent it*. And I will prevent it for, otherwise, I would lose my revenge," and an evil light came into the face of the Sea Brigand chief, marring its manly beauty, for only at times was the stamp of evil impressed upon his really fine countenance.

Then he moved slowly up the hill, muttering:

"Now to call Santo out of his den, and I hope he has men enough, with those whom I left at Jamaica, to follow me with provisions, to make a respectable crew."

He walked on up the hill and soon heard voices.

He stepped into a thicket and saw Santo and a number of men come cautiously into view.

It was very evident that they thought the vessels had gone, but were not wholly sure of the fact.

"Ho, lads, this way!" shouted Captain Kent, and with one accord the buccaneers stampeded back toward their hiding-place, feeling sure that they were surprised by men-o-war's men.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE CHIEF'S RESOLVE.

THE chief broke into a burst of wringing laughter at the sudden stampede of Santo and his men.

He watched their flight for an instant and then followed, while he called out in his ringing voice:

"Santo ahoy! Ho, Santo, ahoy!"

Santo heard the hail and knew the voice.

It at once came to him that in some mysterious way Captain Kent had escaped capture or death.

So he called out, as he stopped his flight:

"Ho, lads, it is the chief who hails!"

The Island Captain at once turned about, but some of his men did not halt until they had reached the tree up which they had to climb to safety.

They had become cowed by their hiding and short rations and were more willing to fly than fight.

So the Island Captain came back and met his chief, the others advancing cautiously:

"Well, Santo, fortune seems to be in our favor," said Captain Kent cheerily.

"Say rather against us, chief."

"No, you have saved your neck, as I have, and you seem to have a fair start for another crew."

"But the people have been taken, Senor Chief, the booty seized, and I much fear me that your vessel is lost, for I saw their sail going away this morning from our point of lookout."

"I admit all that, Santo, but I have my life, you have yours, and you have the sea barge in hiding, so we are not so bad off."

"You know this, chief?"

"Yes, as I know that my boy officer ran the brig-of-war in here and all is owing to him."

"But now let me have your report, Senor Santo."

It was given quickly and frankly, and the chief listened with deepest attention.

He seemed to feel that Santo told the truth, and then said:

"Now, Senor Santo, I cannot see that I can lay the slightest blame at your door."

"It was something that could not be helped, and I do not believe, but for the two tempests, the lad would have brought the brig in here."

"He certainly made conditions with the brig's commander to save you, as I heard one of the men say, and not to have one of our people put to death."

"He saved my life and got my release from Captain Carr, and though I lost my schooner, I yet am by no means in despair."

"On my way here, I sent Officer Rapier and twenty men in a prize into Jamaica, with orders to get certain stores, ammunition and fittings needed for the Red Wings, and he should arrive here in ten days at furthest."

"He will come in a very trim *goleta*, the prize I captured, and, I will have as officers, Rapier, yourself and Benito, whom I shall make an officer, as I have before intended doing."

"I thank you, chief," said Benito, who had come up while Captain Kent was talking.

"Now, how many men have you, Santo?"

"There are eighteen of us all told, senor."

"And Rapier has twenty, so counting myself, we have forty in all, not a bad showing to start with by any means."

The buccaneers gave a cheer at this, and all went down to the shore to enjoy a substantial breakfast.

As they did so they discovered fully half a score men upon the beach, slowly making their way around to the landing.

"Bravo, Senor Santo, these are some of my men who jumped overboard in the action, swam ashore, and are now creeping out of their hiding-places," cried Captain Kent.

A shout from Santo brought the men quickly to the hill, and they were found to be fourteen in number, though several of them were wounded more or less severely.

"These give us a crew of fifty, Senor Santo, so another Red Wings will soon sail the seas under the black flag," cried Captain Kent, with real enthusiasm.

A camp was soon made, shelters thrown up, the wounded chief and others put themselves in Santo's hands, and the provisions were taken from the store-cave, and found to be in sufficient quantity to last for some weeks.

So after all the island buccaneers began to congratulate themselves upon their good fortune, in spite of the capture of the Red Wings, their people and booty.

Days passed away, and yet the *goleta* expected from Jamaica did not put in an appearance.

Still the chief did not give her up, as he felt that many delays might occur, and even if she failed altogether to appear, they had the sea barge, capable of carrying forty men, which could bear all on the island away.

It was a good sea-boat, too, and Captain Kent had great confidence in his own resources, as did also his men.

One morning early a sail was sighted far off upon the inland sea.

In half an hour it was seen to be heading for the island, and all supposed it to be the *goleta*.

But the glass of Santo soon showed that they were mistaken.

"It is not the *goleta*, but a brig, Senor Chief, and a large one," said Senor Santo.

At once a look of consternation rested on the faces of the men.

"Is she coming this way, Santo?"

"Yes, chief."

Captain Kent took the glass, and after a long look at the strange sail, he said quietly:

"Men, she will drop anchor in the harbor within four hours, so we have that time to destroy all trace of our camps, leave matters as they were left by the brig-of-war, and get into hiding."

"No fire must be built, for it will be seen, and I believe the vessel is the same that was here before."

"Now go to work with system, and then assemble to retire to your hiding-place in the coral cavern."

"We have our arms there, and if they discover us and seek to capture us, then we are thirty men and must not be taken, for it is an easier death to die by steel or lead than by a rope from the yard-arm of yonder brig."

The buccaneers saw that their chief was in deadly earnest, and they gave him three ringing cheers to show that they would stand by him, come what might.

Within a couple of hours the island presented the appearance of being deserted, just as it had looked when left by the brig-of-war.

The camps had been scattered, and the

men were ready to retire to their hiding-place.

Then Captain Kent, who had been watching the coming vessel attentively through his glass, said:

"Senor Santo, that is a brig-of-war and an American, but not the Restless."

"She is a beautiful vessel, and I think it would be a good idea for us to watch our chance to see if she cannot be taken when her crew are ashore."

CHAPTER XLIX.

BUCCANEERS IN AMBUSH.

FROM his point of observation, Captain Kent watched the incoming vessel with searching eyes.

His glass was a good one, he had no fear of being seen himself, and he took the craft in from the razor-like bows to her gaunt stern.

He saw that her hull was a perfect model, and that she was a new vessel, carried a splendid battery and a large crew.

The men were at the guns as she neared the island, showing that her commander expected resistance.

Then Buccaneer Kent took in her rig.

He saw that her masts were very lofty, raking, and spread a very large area of sail.

With the wind then blowing, and it was light, she was sailing like a yacht.

She cut through the waters with no effort, and came on in a way which caused Captain Kent to say:

"Santo, she has a pilot."

"It would seem so, senor."

"It is certain, and perhaps she has met and spoken the Restless, and so runs here for a look at the island."

"Having gotten a pilot from the Restless?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps Pinto."

"It may be."

"I hope so, senor."

"I would like to capture the lad."

"Not to harm him?"

"Oh no, I only wish to have him become a pirate, that is all."

After a further look at the vessel Captain Kent said:

"Santo?"

"Yes, chief."

"That is the most beautiful vessel I ever saw."

"So I was thinking, senor."

"She is even more trim-built than the Red Wings."

"And sails as well."

"I believe she can outsail her."

"I wish we had her, senor."

"As I do."

"But she has a large crew."

"Nothing less than a hundred."

"All of that number, senor."

The brig now rounded into the harbor entrance and came on in the same graceful manner as before.

As she passed the headland her boatswain's whistle sounded and she took in sail in masterly style until she glided across the harbor, and from the lookout of the buccaneers only the topmasts could be seen.

But they heard the plunge as her anchors were let fall, and not long after beheld the crew ashore.

"Santo!"

"Chief!"

"We must try and get that vessel."

"Yes, chief."

"It may be a desperate undertaking, but I would never miss the Red Wings once I commanded yonder craft."

"If they show a weak spot, chief, it will be well to take advantage of it."

"Yes, and we will keep a watch for our chance, for they may let the crew camp ashore and if so we must be ready to take advantage of all in our favor."

The brig meanwhile had dropped anchor and her crew had landed.

They scattered about the island, little dreaming that they were watched by the buccaneers.

As night came on they went back to the shore and were allowed to camp.

The moon rose in full radiance from the sea, and then the chief called to Santo and the two slipped down from their hiding-place.

The chief had decided upon some bold move to capture the brig.

"I only wish we had the *goleta's* crew here, though it is fortunate she has not arrived, as she would have been taken," said the chief.

Soon they saw a form advancing and they shrunk from view.

The form came over slowly, and halted within ten feet of them.

It was a man in officer's uniform.

He took off his cap, baring his brow to the cool breeze, and seemed to contemplate the beauty of the scene.

The moonlight fell full upon his face and Santo clutched the arm of the chief quickly and whispered:

"It is the escaped prisoner—the Gold-Hunter whom Pinto set free."

Chief Kent made no reply, and the two waited, until after a short halt he looked back toward the camps, as though to see if he was followed, and then moved on once more.

When he had gone a short distance Captain Kent said:

"Come!"

They followed him until he passed down a vale where they had no place of shelter, and so they halted.

"We must capture him upon his return, Santo."

"Yes, senor, for he can only come back this way."

They then took a position, one on either side of a thicket and waited.

For a long while the officer was gone, but at last the moonlight revealed him coming up the vale.

He was walking slowly, and as though in deep thought.

Wholly unsuspecting of danger, he was passing the ambushed buccaneers when suddenly they sprung upon him from either side.

A stunning blow dazed his senses, while a clutch of iron was upon his throat.

Quickly he was bound with the scarfs of the two pirate officers and then he was securely gagged.

"Come in with us, for your life depends upon it," said Captain Kent, sternly.

There was nothing to do but obey, and the officer walked on between his two captors.

They knew their danger, but had to take the chances.

Should any of the crew of the brig appear they were lost.

But no one appeared in sight and their prisoner was led to a tree near their hiding-place.

Santo climbed to the top and soon lowered a rope from the retreat.

This Captain Kent made fast around the form of the prisoner and gave the low command:

"Haul away!"

Up into the air went the prisoner, drawn up to the ledge by the strong arms of the buccaneers, and then a rope ladder, made for their convenience, was lowered for the captain to climb up on.

When he reached the ledge he found the prisoner in the cavern and Santo sat near him with a drawn knife.

"Now, Senor Chief, you can ask him what questions you desire, and if he raises his voice to give an alarm, I shall put my knife in his heart," said Santo.

"You are sure this is your man, Santo?" asked Captain Kent who it will be remembered had never seen the crew of the Gold-Seeker.

"I am making no mistake, senor, for this is Captain Harold, whom you remember I told you I thought was an officer of the navy?"

"Yes, I remember," and turning to the prisoner he continued:

"Now, senor, I desire a few words with you."

CHAPTER L.

THE OFFICER PRISONER.

THE impromptu gag was taken from the mouth of the prisoner, and he was placed where the moonlight would fall full upon him, while Santo, with his long, ugly knife sat by him.

"Senor, I know you as the man who came here in the schooner, finding your way into the harbor, and by your escape nearly cost-

ing me my life, for I was accused of aiding you.

"Now, senor, our lives depend upon our silence, and if you attempt to give an alarm I shall knife you, so be warned," and Santo drew nearer to the prisoner.

Captain Kent then came forward and said politely:

"I am known as Kent the Buccaneer, senor, and you are Captain Harold?"

"I am Captain Hartwell of the United States Navy," was the reply.

"Ah! now I know you, senor, as Harold Hartwell of the navy, so you were Captain Harold when you came here—a naval officer sailing under false colors, eh?"

All saw the face of the prisoner flush and then grow pale, but he said sternly:

"You are mistaken in your man."

"No, I hardly think so, though I confess not to having seen you when you were a prisoner here."

"But Senor Santo had you in charge and knows you well."

"He is mistaken."

"I am not, senor," was Santo's firm response.

"You are sure, Santo?"

"Yes, senor."

"I wish no mistake made."

"There is no mistake, chief."

"There were others of the men who saw this prisoner when here?"

"Yes, senor, half a dozen of those now with us."

"Call them here!"

This was done, and one by one they were asked if they had ever seen the prisoner before.

Without an exception they pronounced him Captain Harold.

"I am convinced, senor, and now I have some questions to ask you."

"Well, let me hear what you have to say, Sir Pirate."

"Senor Captain Harold, you came into these waters in a schooner for some secret purpose."

"I am led to believe your purpose was to find a pirate treasure you knew the existence of, or to get something of value buried here among the islands by some wrecked crew of an American vessel."

"It is not true."

"I assert that it is true, for nothing else would have brought you here in an unarmed vessel."

"Now you are my prisoner, and I wish to make an exchange with you."

"Well?"

"I wish to give you your liberty for your secret."

"I have none."

"I differ with you, senor, for I know that you have."

"I have not."

"If you value your life, senor, you will give up your gold."

"If you value your gold more, then your life will be the forfeit."

"I have no gold."

"Pardon me, but in the sloop in which you made your escape was a very handsome little fortune in gold, silver and gems."

"You carried it off with you, and you got it."

"I did not."

"I must also say, Captain Harold, that you deserted the brave boy who aided you to escape, well knowing that his life would be the forfeit of his act."

Both the chief, Santo and Benito, for the latter was present, saw the prisoner start at this charge against him.

"Now, Captain Harold, as you deserted the boy, I shall hold you responsible for his death, as my lieutenant here at once put him to death for this act."

"The boy is not dead!" quickly said the prisoner.

Captain Kent laughed and said:

"I said what I did to entrap you, senor, for I thought there might be a doubt; but as you say, the boy was not killed, for you have since seen him!"

The prisoner was taken aback at the manner in which he had admitted his identity, and remained silent.

"You picked the boy up at sea, captain, in an open boat, and recognized him as the one you had deserted."

"He had escaped from the island, and he

recognized you; but you told him your crew forced you to desert him, and he believed you.

"You told him that you had come again after a treasure to these islands, and did not wish the crew to know you had met before.

"Then you landed on an island one day with him, and once more you deserted him."

"It is false!"

"It is true, senor, for I found the boy on that island, and he told me all.

"I know you thoroughly, senor, and now find you here in command of one of the most beautiful vessels I ever saw.

"Only a short while ago the brig Restless, Captain Carr, was here, and the boy you so cruelly deserted, saved her from being wrecked.

"Captain Carr captured my band, carried off my booty, and lay waiting here for my return, when he sunk my schooner, and I, with a few of my men, barely escaped the yard-arm, as you may surmise.

"Now you have come here, and I am sure that you are treasure-hunting, so give up your secret or your life, senor, for it comes to just that."

Harold Hartwell was in a quandary, and a terrible one.

He saw the fortune he had so sinned for put against his life.

Both were dear to him, but what was a fortune to leave to others and not possess?

"I wish time to consider, Sir Pirate," he said, after awhile.

"You shall have it, senor, for without you your vessel will hardly sail, and it may be that I can get possession of her.

"I will give you what time you wish."

"Ten days—"

"No, no, I am not so foolish as that, nor did I expect you to claim such indulgence from me.

"I will allow you two days to consider, and perhaps at the end of that time I may be in a position to make better terms."

"How do you mean?"

"Wait and see, senor."

"I believe you have the thought of trying to seize my vessel."

"I confess to it."

"You will not find it an easy task, if you had double my force."

"May I ask what your crew numbers?"

"Over a hundred."

"And I have but thirty buccaneers for the work in hand; but strategy sometimes is better than force."

"You will find your strategy and strength both useless in the capture of my vessel."

"We shall see, senor; but now pardon me if I must treat you with some severity until the two days have passed.

"Santo, I leave the prisoner in your keeping."

CHAPTER LI.

THE CHIEF'S STRATEGY.

WHEN the morning dawned there came no order from Captain Hartwell to his crew.

At last a lieutenant entered the cabin, to ask for orders, and he was not there.

Neither was he to be found ashore.

All was at once excitement among officers and men.

The captain had gone, they then remembered, for a walk, all alone, over the island, in the moonlight.

At once a search was made, but without result.

Then the officer next in command sent out a dozen searching parties, under an officer.

Every part of the island was visited, but no trace could be found of the missing officer until at last a party came in and said that tracks had been found upon a cliff overhanging the sea, and there were traces that showed the earth had caved in there.

Thither the officers went and there they found the tracks, which might, or might not, be those of the missing captain.

Then all saw that the land crumbled there and very lately a large quantity had gone down into the sea.

In the absence of the captain, his body, or further proof, all felt sure that Captain Hartwell had walked to the edge of the cliff the night before and the earth giving way he had been thrown into the sea and thus met his death.

Night came on and a gloom was upon the crew of the brig, for the captain of the Storm Bird, was a very popular man with his officers and men alike.

It was decided to camp on shore and nearly the whole crew to devote the next day to a more thorough search of the island.

Soon after nightfall the men went to their respective camps and silence fell upon the island.

Several of the officers had gathered together in a group ashore and were discussing their misfortune in the mysterious disappearance of their commander.

In vain they tried to solve the mystery, for only the one solution, the caving in of the cliff, would come to their minds as the true one.

Still the island should be searched upon the morrow in every crevice.

At last the group of officers "turned in" and about the only ones awake at midnight were the watch upon the brig for it had not been considered necessary to station a guard ashore.

It would have been well had a guard been on the watch ashore, for he would have seen dark forms skirting the thicket, passing down the pathway to the shore and assembling upon the beach.

There upon the beach were the boats from the brig, four in number, their anchors thrown out upon the shore to keep them from drifting.

The anchors were picked up and placed in the boats and into each of the latter got half a dozen or more men.

The moon had not risen high enough yet to light up the harbor, and the brig lay at anchor just where the shadows of the shore ended.

The boats moved out toward the brig in file, and as they approached the officer of the watch hailed.

"Captain Hartwell has been found and is coming aboard," came the answer.

A moment more and the leading boat ran alongside at the gangway.

There were not half a dozen men upon the brig's decks, with perhaps several officers and a couple of dozen below decks.

The officer of the watch met the boat at the gangway to be suddenly felled to the deck by a blow.

A few shots were fired, but they came from the brig's crew who were now alarmed, and the men who fell were buccaneers.

But the buccaneers held the ship in a minute of time and officers and men as they rushed on deck from below were seized and made prisoners, for the crew seemed bewildered at what was happening.

"Up with the anchors, Benito!"

"Yes, senor."

"Get sail on the brig, Senor Santo."

"Yes, senor."

The orders were quickly given and obeyed, for ashore now all was alarm.

The camp had been aroused by the firing of the shots on board the brig, and officers and men were rushing down to the beach.

But their boats were gone.

"Storm Bird ahoy!" shouted an officer.

"No response came,

"Ahoy! ahoy the brig!"

Then came a reply in an officer's voice.

"Help, mates, for buccaneers have seized the brig!"

A groan burst from the throats of nearly a hundred men, and one daring officer called out:

"Let us swim out and board her, lads!"

A few answered with a cheer, but the desperate proposition was not to be thought of.

Then those ashore saw the white sails of the brig being set, and heard the rattle of the capstan as the anchors were being raised.

What to do no one knew, and all stood bewildered, wondering what it all meant.

At last the brig's bows fell off before the breeze, the anchors were apeak and a loud voice hailed the shore:

"Ho, ashore there!"

"Ahoy the brig!"

"I have taken possession of your vessel as I need her, and shall go for a short cruise; but I will return to make terms with you."

"Who are you?" called out the lieutenant commanding.

"Kent the Buccaneer," was the reply.

"I would ask if you know aught of our commander, Captain Harold Hartwell?"

"We found a junior officer in command and he says the captain was ashore," came the evasive reply, and the officers and men took it as Kent had intended they should, that he knew nothing of the commander of the brig.

The brig had now moved around to the breeze and was gliding swiftly out to sea to the utter consternation of her crew ashore.

Would he return for them?

Would he not leave them there to perish?

Such were the questions the men asked each other over and over again.

They rushed up to the hill and gazing seaward saw the brig sweep out into open water.

But they saw also another sail, a smaller vessel, standing in toward the island.

What did it mean?

CHAPTER LII.

THE CHASE.

CAPTAIN KENT had kept his word, to accomplish by strategy what he was unable to do with numbers.

He had talked over the matter with Santo and Benito and came to the conclusion, as the search of the brig's crew had failed to discover Captain Hartwell, that the men would remain ashore at night.

He had seen from his point of lookout that the crew had become convinced that the captain had gone over the cliff, which had caved in with him.

But he felt sure that they would not yet give up the search, and so he asked Santo what he thought of the chances of seizing the brig.

"You know best, senor."

"And you, Benito?"

"I am ready to follow your lead, chief."

"Well, we will see what the chances are, and if there is one in a hundred I will act, for I want that brig," said Captain Kent, in a determined way.

Just at sunset Santo, who was sweeping the sea with his glass, pointed to a sail.

After some time Kent said:

"It is my *goleta*."

"Ah, senor, she will be taken then."

"Yes, Santo, if we do not prevent it."

"How can we, senor?"

"We can, I think."

"Yet I was unable to warn you when your schooner was sighted, Senor Chief."

"Well, we must save the *goleta*."

"Yes, senor, if possible."

"They do not keep a watch of the sea?"

"I think not, senor."

"No, they have nothing to watch for, while we have."

"Yes, chief."

"They do not therefore see the sail, and I hope will not do so."

"You are sure it is the *goleta*, chief?"

"Perfectly sure."

"She is yet a long way off."

"Yes, and I am glad of it, for she will not run in until late, and I think the wind is dying out."

"I hope so."

"Now, Santo and Benito, we must act."

"What can we do, chief?"

"We must act to-night, senors, and our only way to do is to seize the brig."

"If we can."

"We must."

The two pirate officers said nothing, yet they held confidence in their chief and felt that he was thinking of some plan.

At last he said:

"As soon as it is dark, I will slip out from here and reconnoiter the exact position of the crew of the brig."

"If they remain ashore, then their boats are on the beach, and I do not think more than a third of their men will remain on board."

"In that case we can gain the shore, take their boats, row off, and seize their vessel."

"If they all remain aboard, if we swim to the ledge we can get the sea barge and go out and warn the *goleta*, for she must not be taken, as she is our hope if we fail with the brig."

"Yes, senor."

"If we warn the *goleta*, with the addition of her crew, we can come in and carry the brig by boarding, for we will take them by surprise, and what if they are two to one against us, we have fought more than such odds before."

Thus did Kent the Buccaneer warm up his officers to partake of his daring, almost desperate views.

After dark he went out on a reconnoissance, saw just how the situation lay, with all the chances for and against him, and returned to give the order to move.

He dared not take Captain Hartwell along, so selected one man to remain as his guard, and the officer was not only bound hands and feet, but also securely gagged.

He was then left in the cavern, and his guard, an English pirate, was placed over him, and told that he should be held answerable for his prisoner.

Then the buccaneers slipped off their shoes, buckled on their pistols and cutlasses, and with their muskets in hand left the hiding-place which had served them so well.

Captain Kent led them on the way, and silent as specters they went along the path, flanking the sleeping camp of the American sailors and going on down to the boats.

No sentinel was seen, no challenge was heard, and the boats were reached, when still no opposition was found.

The boarding of the brig and her capture is known, and thus with hardly over one-fourth the number of the crew of the Storm Bird, the daring buccaneer chief had carried the vessel-of-war and held her captain in his power.

Under other circumstances Captain Kent would have remained at anchor, his men at the brig's guns; but, he was anxious to run out and meet the *goleta*, and also he thought his going would the better acquaint his men with their vessel and show to the Americans ashore that he was in deadly earnest.

The brig, therefore, swept out of the harbor to find the *goleta* but a mile away, coming on slowly under a breeze that was hardly blowing over three knots an hour.

But the brig seemed to have breeze enough to send her along at five knots, and she won the admiration of the chief and each one of his men.

Below decks were the officers and men, all in irons, and a sad, wretched lot they were.

The *goleta* saw the brig run out and at once put about, starting in flight, for they could see by the moonlight that it was not the Red Wings.

"Shall I bring her to with a gun, sir?" asked Santo.

"Oh no, the *goleta* is very fast and I will give chase to see just what this vessel can do," was the answer.

"Then I shall set more sail, senor?"

"No, let her go with what she has."

It did not take very long to see that the brig was really gaining upon the *goleta*, which had up everything that would draw.

The Storm Bird, however, did not set any more canvas than what she had up on leaving the island harbor, and still she gained.

"She's a wonder, Senor Santo."

"She is indeed, senor, if the *goleta* is fast, and she appears to be."

"She is so fleet that it took the Red Wings half a day to overhaul her."

"Then the brig is indeed a marvel, senor."

There was no doubt but that those upon the *goleta* were terribly alarmed.

But for a small craft with a few men, to resist a large armed cruiser, was not to be thought of, and the *goleta* could only hold on her way in flight.

"*Goleta*, ahoy!" shouted Kent, as they came within hailing distance.

"Ahoy, the brig!"

"Rapier, are you on board?"

"Ay, ay, senor; but what a fright you gave us."

"Yes, I have changed my schooner for this brig."

"How she sails, for we were doing our best."

"Yes, she outfoots the Red Wings; but put about and follow me back to the island," and the Storm Bird went about, and with the *goleta* in her wake, returned to the buccaneers' retreat.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE LOST BRIG.

It was sunrise when the brig ran back into the island harbor.

She dropped anchor off-shore some distance, and the *goleta* coming in, anchored astern of her a cable's length.

The sailors on the shore were disconsolate, and watched her coming with strange interest.

What was in store for them they did not know.

When the *goleta* anchored, Captain Kent hailed, and ordered Rapier, the officer in command, to come on board, which he did.

Then Captain Kent, with his three officers, Rapier, Santo and Benito went into the cabin of the Storm Bird for a consultation.

The Senor Rapier was a fine-looking man, an American from the Gulf shores, and reported that he had been chased off his course twice by cruisers, and hence his delay in reaching the island.

He regretted the misfortune of the unsuccessful attack made upon the island, but congratulated his chief upon his daring and brilliant capture of the Storm Bird.

"Now, senors, those American officers and seamen are upon our hands, and you know that I never strike back at my own countrymen, though I have taken this brig, but not until she came into my retreat, and after the loss of my own vessels."

"Now, I desire to treat these people well, and so I shall give them the *goleta* in which to go home."

"You are kind, senor," said Santo.

"Senor Rapier, I wish you to bring the *goleta* alongside of the brig and transfer the stores which you got for me, excepting enough for the American crew in their run north."

"Then I shall transfer the prisoners on board the brig to the *goleta*, and sail out of the harbor, leaving the little vessel to send her boats ashore and take aboard her men."

"And the captain, senor?"

"The commander of the brig you mean, Santo?"

"Yes, senor."

"When I have seen the *goleta* well out of these waters I shall return to this island, and give Captain Hartwell a chance to pilot us to the island where lies the treasure which he has come here, for the third time, to secure."

"Suppose he refuses?"

"Then we lose the treasure, for if he is not frightened into confessing by my threats I shall not harm him, but land him at an American port, where he can go and make known to the Government what a cruel monster is Kent the Buccaneer."

Captain Kent then bade Senor Rapier obey his orders and that officer departed for the *goleta*.

The crew ashore, helpless, for they had no boat, watched the *goleta* hauled alongside of the brig, and wondered what was going on.

When the transfer had been made, of things wished by the chief, he sent to have the officers of the brig brought before him.

They soon came, three in number.

"Senors, I wish to say to you that the United States brig-of-war Restless came into my retreat a short while since, carried off my people and booty, and captured a prize schooner and my own vessel, the Red Wings."

"I am an American and I struck no blow in defense of my beautiful vessel, and yet I managed, with some of my crew to escape."

"Last night I was so fortunate as to capture your brig, and you must give me credit for not having fired a shot, though several of my own men fell."

"The *goleta* alongside is a stanch, swift vessel, and was the yacht of a Cuban planter."

"She is roomy, is well provisioned, and will carry your crew comfortably and in safety to whatever port you wish to sail."

"You may call her your prize, if so you will, in place of your splendid brig."

"I shall now let you go on board the *goleta*, and when the brig is under way you can take the irons off of your men, for I shall not release them, as you see how small my force is."

"You can then send your boats ashore for the remainder of your crew, and you are at liberty to sail at your pleasure for America."

"I will escort you in the brig well out of these dangerous waters, and when you wish to avenge yourselves by recapturing the brig you will find her at sea cruising under the name of the Red Wings, and you are welcome to hang me to the yard arm, if you can catch me."

"Senors, I wish you a very pleasant voyage."

The officers bowed coldly, while one could not restrain himself from saying:

"Well, sir, you can act the gentleman as well as the pirate."

"I was born one, senor," was the cool response; and the officer departed from the cabin of the brig.

Soon after the men, still in irons, were transferred to the brig, and the latter vessel, leaving the *goleta* at anchor, set sail and headed for the open sea.

"What is going on?" asked one of the officers on the shore, and all watched the *goleta* drawn up alongside the brig and soon after the latter swung free and set sail.

To their amazement a boat then came away from the *goleta's* side, and in it they recognized a brother officer and seamen of the Storm Bird.

Then another boat shoved off and came shoreward, and they soon made a landing.

The senior officer then told of the message sent by Captain Kent, and all was at once hasty to get on board.

"We must overhaul her if we can, and in spite of her hot fire board and recover the brig," said the lieutenant in command, and his desire seemed to be received with general satisfaction.

But could the *goleta* overhaul the brig was the question.

They hoped so, and the boats plied rapidly to and from the shore until all were on board.

Then the anchor was gotten up, the sails set and the *goleta* stood out of the harbor under a heavy pressure of canvas.

The brig was a couple of miles away, going along under barely canvas enough to move her through the waters and hold steerageway upon her.

The *goleta* crowded on everything in chase.

Then the brig's sails began to show themselves and the people of the *goleta* were not very long in discovering that though the *goleta* was a very fast boat the one they pursued could keep her own distance ahead.

Thus they sailed though the afternoon and night came on.

But the brig increased her lead and when all eyes seemed to be looking at the brig she suddenly disappeared.

The *goleta* cruised about half the night in search of her, but without result, and when day dawned no sail was in sight and the little craft headed for the United States, a gloom upon officers and crew at the sad ending of what had promised to be a most successful cruise.

The mysterious disappearance of the brig had been occasioned by one of Buccaneer Kent's old and clever tricks, for all sail had been taken in instantly, leaving the vessel under bare poles.

When the *goleta* failed to find her, Captain Kent had ordered the brig to get under sail and head back for the island.

CHAPTER LIV.

TOO GREAT A TEMPTATION.

HAROLD HARTWELL keenly felt the situation into which he had gotten himself.

He had been placed in command of the fleetest and finest craft in the navy, and had come to the Bahamas nominally to serve the Government, really to benefit himself, by getting the treasure island free of buccaneers so he could return and secure his fortune.

Upon the very day of his arrival he found that some gallant naval officer had been before him in the duty to be done, and his chances were gone to win fame, though the coast was clear, so to speak, for him to get his treasure.

But that very night, while he was away alone from his men, seeking the place where the treasure was hidden, he had been cleverly captured by Kent the Buccaneer himself, and found himself known as "Captain Harold the Gold-Seeker," as well as the one who had twice deserted Pinto, the lad who had served him so well.

Nor was this all, for he was told he had either to divulge the secret of where the treasure was buried, or he had to lose his life.

He knew that the excitement of his officers and men, at his failing to be found, was intense, and any moment the brig might sail to report his loss to the Government.

Then came the plot of Captain Kent to capture his brig, and though he laughed at it

as ridiculous, knowing the few men the buccaneer chief had, he was soon convinced that something was wrong.

He was therefore startled the next morning by being told by his guard that the brig had been taken by the buccaneers and his crew were helpless ashore.

Not until his guard permitted him to see the brig coming in with the *goleta* did he realize what had been told him was true.

Then Harold Hartwell anxiously awaited developments, asking his guard often for information.

From their position the two vessels could be seen distinctly, and at last Captain Hartwell felt sure that the buccaneer intended to transfer the crew of the brig to the *goleta* and allow them to go, for what else could be done with them he argued.

So he turned to his guard and said:

"My man, you know why I am being held by your chief, I guess?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are aware that I have twice before come here to these islands to secure a treasure that I know of?"

"So they said, sir."

"Now, if I have twice risked my life here, in an unarmed craft, it must be for what I am well aware is a very large treasure."

"I should think so."

"The last time I came I discovered that the buccaneers prevented me from securing the treasure, so I went back, asked for the command of a vessel-of-war, was given it, and came here to first run down the Bahama Buccaneers.

"Are you listening?"

"To every word, sir."

"Now I take it you are an Englishman?"

"I am, sir."

"But a buccaneer now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I have nothing to do with the motive that drove you to piracy, but I feel that you are a free rover to gain gold.

"Your chief offers me life and freedom upon condition I give up my treasure.

"If I agree to his terms, then the treasure is to be divided among your band, numbering, all told, I have heard, some fifty men."

"Yes, captain."

"Now, large as the treasure is, divided into fifty parts each man would secure a few thousands.

"But, divided by *two*, each man would get a fortune."

"Yes, sir."

"Now Captain Kent is preparing to put my crew in the *goleta* and let them go, for he cannot hold them as you know.

"Not a man on board my vessel knows what I have told you about the treasure, and I alone know where to find it."

"I understand, sir."

"If I have to give up the treasure to save my life I lose all, and you are only benefited in a small way.

"If I say to you I'll divide with you to save my life, then we both get a large fortune.

"Understand?"

"Partly, captain."

"Now if you go with me down among my crew, disguising ourselves so your chief and comrades do not know us, and I order my men to keep quiet about my presence, we will go on the *goleta* with the others.

"You are a pirate, but I will claim clemency for you for having saved my life, and you'll be pardoned, for I pledge you my word in this.

"Then I'll ask to be relieved from duty, which will readily be granted, as I have lost my splendid ship to the buccaneers I came to capture, and perhaps I may be court-martialed.

"Then I will fit out a small craft, purchasing the *goleta* then, I guess, and you shall be mate."

"Yes, sir."

"We will get a small, trusty crew, and sail for the island and carry back the treasure.

"We can bring a coffin along, claiming that we came for the body of some distinguished man; and we can then divide the treasure.

"What do you say, my man?"

The Englishman showed his excitement in his face.

He was a pirate by force of circumstances

over which he had had no control, and he was struggling hard for a fortune.

Here was a chance to rescue a captain of the American Navy from the buccaneers, claiming that he was also their captain, and to secure half of a buried treasure, which would bring him an enormous fortune.

He was so excited for awhile that he could not answer, and asked for a few minutes of thought.

Taking his position of lookout, he saw the brig just leaving the side of the *goleta*, and Santo's glass, left with him, revealed the fact that the several officers of the brig had been transferred to the *goleta*, with the crew who had been captured, on board.

Then he saw the officers taking the irons off their men.

He glanced toward the brig and saw her standing out of the harbor, and only the buccaneers upon her decks.

This proved that the American crew had been given the *goleta* to return to their country in.

At once he decided to act, and the temptation was too much for him, and he said:

"Captain, I yield on your pledged word to do as you have promised.

"Come, there are some American sailors' uniforms here in the rubbish, so we will put them on and go down to join your crew; but if we are discovered by the chief, we will be hanged, for I know him."

"We must take those chances," was the cool response of the American captain.

CHAPTER LV.

A MISSING MAN.

LIEUTENANT ROSS REMMINGTON, the senior officer of the brig-of-war *Storm Bird*, was in a very unenviable humor at having lost his captain and his ship.

As no buccaneers were supposed to be upon the island, and the men camped ashore, when the boats put off claiming to be the brig's men, he could hardly blame the officer in charge of the *Storm Bird* for having been deceived and captured.

He could only accept the terms offered by the buccaneer chief, to take his men home in the *goleta*.

In the midst of his conversation with the officer who came ashore with the offer of the buccaneer, a midshipman came up and drew him to one side.

What he said caused Lieutenant Remington to call to the officer he had been talking with, and walk back into the thicket.

To their surprise the midshipman led them to where two men in sailor garb awaited them, one of whom had hailed the young officer, and called him aside.

"Captain Hartwell!"

Both officers uttered the name together, for in one of the two men, dressed in the suit of a common sailor, they recognized their commander.

"Gentlemen, there is no time for explanation now, more than to say that I was the captive of the buccaneers, and this man has saved my life.

"We must not be seen by the buccaneers, so will go at once on board the *goleta* in this disguise, and the men must make no recognition of me.

"I will explain all once we are out of danger."

The two officers quickly grasped the hand of their captain, in congratulation at his escape, and then it was arranged to have the commander and his rescuer go to the beach separately, and to take their places in one of the boats.

This was done, the men who recognized their chief showing no demonstration which others would not understand.

All felt that the glass of the buccaneer chief was upon them from the deck of the *Storm Bird*, and upon arriving on board the *goleta* Captain Hartwell and Buccaneer Ferris went below.

The *goleta's* boats made a number of trips to the shore after the crew, and when all were on board the anchor was gotten up and sail set.

Of course the little vessel was well crowded, but she had comfortable quarters, as well as a spacious, almost luxurious cabin.

Buccaneer Kent had been most generous in the way of provisions, and there would certainly be no suffering among the crew on the run home.

Lieutenant Remmington took command, and though the lateen rig of the *goleta* was new to the American sailors they soon learned how to handle the sails, and sped out of the harbor in fine style.

During the next night the brig disappeared and those on the *goleta* breathed more freely, while Captain Hartwell came on deck and once more resumed command, having made the explanation that he had been captured by the buccaneers, who, when they went to seize the brig, left him in the charge of Ferris, who at once took the opportunity of escaping and also rescuing the American officer.

"I was to be held for ransom," he added, "and when the buccaneer chief returns to the island and discovers my escape he will at once come in chase of the *goleta* I am sure, and you know the speed of the vessel we have lost, Mr. Remmington, so keep this craft under all the sail she can stand."

"I will do so, sir, for well I know the *Storm Bird's* speed, though this craft is a fast flyer," was the answer.

The buccaneer, Ferris, was willing to go on duty for the voyage, but was given the freedom of the ship by Captain Hartwell, and being a pleasant sort of a fellow, well informed, and not suspected of having acted for a reward, he was liked by all and regarded as quite a hero.

The *goleta*, as has been stated, was built for a yacht, having belonged to a wealthy Cuban planter, and the former owner's quarters were taken by the captain.

They were luxurious, in the extreme, occupying the stern, with large ports, and fitted up with every comfort.

Further forward was a larger cabin, which the officers occupied, with half a dozen staterooms beyond.

Then came the eating saloon, caboose, and forward were the quarters of the crew.

There was space for only about half of the officers and crew below at one time, so the crew took turn about in turning in, one part sleeping while the other was on duty.

One night when an ugly sea was running and half a gale blowing as the *goleta* was off Hatteras, Captain Hartwell stepped up to a man in storm-coat and hat and said:

"I wish to see you.

"Come to my cabin, but let no one see you."

"Yes, sir," answered the man, and the captain moved away, but soon after went below.

The *goleta*, overweighted as she was, pitched and lurched badly in the rough seas, frequently taking heavy waves of water upon deck.

But the one addressed by the captain made his way below, passing through the cabin where several officers were chatting together, one of whom said:

"Hello, Ferris, too rough for you on deck?"

"It is rather wet, lieutenant," and he took a seat.

No one noticed his leaving, and yet all present recalled seeing him enter the cabin when the next morning the man could not be found.

The ship still pitched in the rough seas, and a search was made when some one asked where Ferris was.

No one knew, no one had seen him since the night before.

Captain Hartwell heard that the man was missing and he seemed greatly distressed and ordered another thorough search of the ship made.

But it was in vain, and it was seen that the man's hammock had not been unrolled.

"He must have been carried overboard in the darkness and storm last night, poor fellow," said Captain Hartwell, and no one doubted but that such had been his fate.

But then no cry had been heard, no one had seen him fall overboard, or carried off upon a wave.

"What things he had brought aboard with him, the captain had kept in the cabin, and the next day they were unrolled and looked over by Harold Hartwell.

"Not so bad for a buccaneer sailor's sayings after all," he muttered as he took a buckskin belt which had been too well filled with gold and valuables for Ferris to wear aboard ship and so he had asked Captain Hartwell to keep it for him.

And so no one knew the solution of the buccaneer's mysterious disappearance, for Captain Hartwell made no explanation of a visit in his cabin of the missing man, for no one had seen him go there.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE WANDERER'S RETURN.

ONE pleasant afternoon, some months after the capture of the Red Wings by the brig-of-war Restless, three vessels glided up the Delaware River and dropped anchor before the City of Philadelphia, where the seat of the American Government was then located.

One of these vessels was the brig-of-war Restless, another the pirate schooner Red Wings, and the third was the smaller schooner which had gone out under Harold Hartwell and become a prize of the buccaneers.

A boat soon after left the brig and moved to the shore, and in it were Captain Clifford Carr and Claude Cassiday.

Upon landing they sought the quarters of the Naval Secretary and that official soon heard the story of the cruise of the Restless, and that, but for the young sailor with him, Captain Carr and his crew would have all gone to the bottom of the sea.

A week after the arrival of the Restless and her prizes in port, Claude Cassiday was given his warrant as a midshipman and granted two months leave of absence.

He at once embarked upon a packet bound to Boston, and found his way upon landing to a pretty little house in the outskirts of the town, and overlooking the bay.

As he approached the house he beheld two persons upon the piazza.

One was a handsome lady of thirty five, clad in widow's weeds, and she was engaged in some needle-work.

The other was a young girl of ten, as pretty as a fairy, and she was reading aloud to her mother while she worked.

The click of the latch on the gate caused both to look up, and they beheld a youth in the uniform of a midshipman entering the yard.

He was apparently fifteen years of age, though really not so old, and his form was erect as a soldier's, sinewy and graceful.

His face was very dark and his every feature was cast in a perfect mold.

A handsome face it was, bold, resolute, intelligent and full of manliness.

He doffed his cap as he reached the steps, and said, politely:

"Mrs. Cassiday, I believe?"

"I am Mrs. Cassiday, sir, and—you—are—"

"Claude! Mamma, it's Claude!" shrieked little Helen, whose childish instinct had told her that the brother she had not seen for four years, the brother whom she had been told was dead, was before her.

With a bound she was in Claude's arms, and this gave the mother time to control her emotion, to gaze more closely into the face she had never expected again to see, and to discover that it was indeed her boy whom she had mourned as dead.

It was an affecting meeting; and glad hearts were in the breasts of the mother and her children as they talked together of all that had happened.

As the scenes of his childhood came back to him, all the past few years seemed like a troubled dream to Claude, as he told his mother and sister all, and how he had lived.

Until late into the night they talked, and then the mother and sister knew that Claude was an officer in the navy of his country, and had won his rank by his pluck.

And Claude heard all about the sad death of his father, and now a noble comrade had stood by him in his dying hour, and had come and told Mrs. Cassiday the whole sad story.

But in the boy's mind, or the mother's, there was no connecting link between that pretended friend, Harold Hartwell, and "Captain Harold," the Gold-Seeker of the Bahamas.

"I have not come home a poor boy, mother, though the money was not earned as I could wish; but it will add to the comfort of yourself and Helen, and I have my midshipman's berth, you know, and intend to rise in my profession, see if I do not," said the gallant young sailor.

CHAPTER LVII.

CONCLUSION.

CLAUDE CASSIDAY, the young sailor who had so nearly been forced to live and die a pirate, kept his word, and rose to higher rank in the service of his country, and living the allotted space of man's years, died respected by all who had known him, while about his life always hung a halo of romance for those who had known of his strange career.

The cruel and dishonorable man who had been treacherous to a dying comrade, and attempted to rob his wife and children of the legacy left to them, had also a checkered career during his later years, and when the end came to him, over his past was folded the mantle of charity, so that his sins were not made known to the world by those whom he had wronged, for love played its part well, and united the hearts of Claude Cassiday and Celeste Hartwell, the beautiful daughter of him who had been the Gold-Seeker of the Bahamas, and in the end the sailor's legacy came to those to whom he had left it.

As for the Buccaneers of the Bahamas, they ran their red race for awhile under their gallant but wicked chief, Kent Curtis, and his new vessel, also named Red Wings, was dreaded in every sea, until retribution, sailing untiringly in his wake, at last ran him down, and ended his career of shame and infamy, while his black flag, with its red wings, was framed, and hangs to-day in the home of his captor, as a souvenir of days that have forever passed away.

THE END.

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